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UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

By Miss Macnaughtan.

A LAME DOG'S DIARY.

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She looked like some lovely swan.

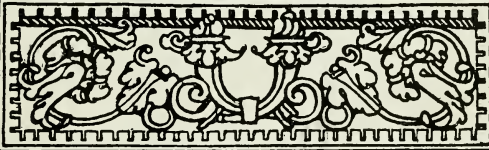


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THE
FORTUNE OF
CHRISTINA
M'NAB

S. Macnaughtan

Thomas Nelson and
Sons, London, Edin-
burgh, and New York





TO
BEATRICE KEMP
I INSCRIBE THIS BOOK

THE FORTUNE OF CHRISTINA M'NAB.

CHAPTER I.

"IT'S an awful lot of money," said Colin.

"Comfortable," replied Christina, with a smirk.

"'Deed, I think it's more than comforts you will be able to purchase now," said Colin dryly; and he added as a logical conclusion, "I suppose you will be marrying some swell, eh?"

"I suppose so," quoth Christina, matter-of-fact and brief, as is the manner of her nation.

"What sort of man are you thinking to get?" asked her companion.

"A lord," replied Christina comprehensively.

May I ask you to imagine that the conversation between these two persons was carried on in the Scottish tongue, of which the accent was broad and a little uncouth, but emphatic. So that when Christina announced her intention to marry a lord she pronounced the word "lorrrd," and it rolled from her lips with a fine convincing resonance.

"I hear they're cheap at present," remarked Colin.

"I can pay top price," retorted Christina, flushing a little.

They both belonged to trade, these young people.

"And you'll no be engaged to me any longer, I suppose?" Colin made the remark without any emotion.

Christina gave a snort of disdain. "'Deed, Sandy," she cried, "does a lassie with eighteen thousand a year marry an electrical engineer?"

"Naw," said Colin judicially, "she does not." He added as an afterthought: "I'm no sure I'd think much of her if she did—at least until she had had a try for something better."

Christina's sniff was a triumph of art in its own way, a very gem amongst sniffs, for it expressed accurately Christina's thoughts and her excellent opinion of her own powers, together with a self-confident assurance of her own success—and all this in one sniff, without the clumsy medium of words.

"Just wait you and see," replied Colin, interpreting with absolute correctness the thought so delicately conveyed.

Christina M'Nab and Colin M'Crae (her hitherto affianced husband) were sitting in the ugly dining-room of an ugly house, in a very ugly town. They sat in the dining-room because the drawing-room was unfurnished—never had been furnished—and all that Christina knew of its habitable qualities was on the occasion of a prayer-meeting which had been held there, and later, during the last three days, when the "corp" had lain within its walls.

The dining-room had all the comfortable stuffiness so

dear to the bourgeois heart and lungs; and the very curtains, carpets, and furniture conveyed a subtle odour of departed dinners, fog, and gas. It was furnished with six horse-hair chairs, and one gent's arm do.; an uneasy sofa, black, shiny, and slippery, boasted the same unlovely covering, and a sausage-shaped cushion upon it suggested a resting-place for the head, with which, as far as comfort was concerned, Jacob's stone would have compared favourably. A round table occupied the middle of the room, and some eight or ten gas jets flared overhead.

"I'll have enough lights for once," Christina had said. This flare of gas jets was her first extravagance.

Colin sat in the gent's armchair, his fair head thrown back on the horse-hair, and on the buttons which indented its surface. He was dressed in workman's clothes, and his boots were big and his hands horny. His face, as nearly as possible, resembled that of the Apollo Belvedere, and his great square shoulders and splendid limbs were those of a graceful young giant.

Christina was dressed in deep mourning—the crape-weighted, solemn mourning of the middle-class Scots-woman. She had frizzy red hair, which was parted down the middle with quite an astonishing air of demureness, and lay like a ruddy mist on her very white forehead. Her eyes were large, and gray, and dreamy, and her nose was very wide-awake, while her mouth was inscrutable and indescribable, and very provoking altogether. She sat on one of the six horse-hair chairs, and gazed admiringly at the gas jets, whose flames were rapidly poisoning the atmosphere.

"It's an awful pity," said Colin, "that you hadn't known all along how rich your father was."

Tears sprang to Christina's lovely eyes. "Eh," she cried, "would any one but an elder of the Free Kirk of Scotland have done it?" A little sob escaped her. "Here have I been dressing on twenty pounds a year, and wearing a jacket two winters, and I have had no one but old Jessie to do for us. I've given way to every girl in the church choir, and hardly dared the presumption of asking the assistant to tea! I've stooped, Colin, stooped to be civil to my inferiors; I even got engaged to be married to an electrical engineer!"

"Ay, and wad have been married to him in six months more," said Colin, grimly triumphing with her in her escape.

"And I've eighteen thousand a year!" cried the girl. She left her seat and came and stood beside the young man, and gave a little shake to his coat-sleeve to emphasize her speech. "I've eighteen thousand a year, and not even an English accent to back me up!"

Colin took a mean advantage of her unusual humility, and began to brag. He said, "Well, I am glad I am a minister's son, and have had a good education, and my grandmother's sister was an English lady, and the wife of an earl."

Christina went back to her place by the table, crossing her hands in a prim way she had, and remarked calmly, "It's not the first time you have told me that; and although it was a Gretna Green marriage, and no just what I would call respectable, it is what always gave you a sort of value in my eyes, and made me give up the assistant in your favour."

“And I can talk very English when I like,” said Colin, quite unmoved. “When I was in London you could hardly tell the difference between me and the other chaps, except that they could never manage to say their ‘r’s.’”

“It is the English beats me,” said Christina, with a sigh. “I can manage French a wee bit, but there is no rule for the English tongue by which a body can pick it up.”

“No, you’ve just got to live amongst them as I did,” said Colin complacently. “I mind there was a great deal in the language which bothered me at first, but I got my tongue round it in time.”

“I hawp,” replied Christina, and her air was really splendid for a little woman—one, moreover, who was hampered by a provincial accent—“I hawp, Colin, that what *you* can manage will not be beyond *my* power to accomplish.”

“Obsairve,” said Colin, “you’ll not need to say ‘hawp.’”

“I did not say ‘hawp.’”

“And English people never say ‘I,’ but ‘Oi.’ Then”—giving himself a satisfied turn in his chair—“there is another thing I nawticed in their language: never say ‘fire’ but ‘fah,’ and so with worrrds of a like description. ‘Ahland’ for ‘Ireland,’ and ‘wahed’ if you have sent a telegram.”

“Thank you, Colin.”

“Again, even when the word is a matter of two syllables, take no notice. Say ‘frah’ for ‘friar,’ and ‘brah’ for ‘briar.’ Thus—‘sweet-brah’ and ‘Black-frah’s-Bridge.’ You can only lairn these things by living in their country.”

"I am going to live in their country; I am going to London."

"So I would suppose. To continue: there are such words as 'burrn' and 'furrn.' Never say them as they are written; say 'buhn' and 'fehn.' It's difficult at furrst, but you'll come into it, just as I did. And in the same way, call the 'door' the 'daw,' and the 'floor' the 'flaw;' and you'll need to call me '*MacCrae*' and yourself '*MacNab*.'"

"I am going to take two 'b's.' Don't let on to any one!"

"Two names would be better, with a wee stroke in between them. What did they call your mother?"

"Macquorquodale — a good Scotch name," replied Christina.

"Maybe the two 'b's' will be better till you change your name. Where are you going to set about looking for your lord?"

"I have considered the subject, but have not yet finally decided," replied Christina. "But I have reason to suppose that London is your best chance."

"I suppose now," said Colin, "you'll need some sort of—I'll not go so far as to say 'education,' but a kind of preparation before you can go into Society?"

"I feel myself fitted to move in the highest saircles," said Christina grandly. Inwardly her heart misgave her. "But it's not to Colin M'Crae I'll show it," she said to herself.

"Woman, you are just perfect," responded Colin, "but you have not got the English tone."

"That's just the bit," replied Christina, humbled suddenly by Colin's kind if only just appreciation of her.

"Now I was thinking I might help you."

"Indeed!" sarcastically.

"You know I'm related to the aristocracy——"

"And don't know one of them, even by head-mark, much less to speak to!" Christina interrupted.

"Whisht now, till I have done. Lady Anne Drummond is own cousin to my mother, wrestle with it how you like. And I happen to know that she is coming in to town; and she is going to be staying at the Grand Hotel too, for I am putting in some lights there, and I have seen the letter in which she engages rooms."

"Are you going to call upon her?" asked Christina sardonically.

"I've done stranger things!"

"You'll get a strange welcome, I am thinking. The Gretna Green marriage was not what you would call popular, I've always understood."

"You don't understand the aristocracy, Christina: the more unpopular a fact is, the better face they try to put on it."

"Curious," said Christina.

"But it's facts I am telling you, and—this for your good, Christina—never give them pity; they would rather take impertinence."

"What will you say to Lady Anne?" asked Christina.

"I'll just say, Cousin Anne, I am engaged to be married to a young lady who has come into a fearful lot of money, and——"

"Colin M'Crae," quoth Christina, "you are driving me very near to desperation."

"Hoots! I'll say that you are going to break off the engagement, if you can get anybody better, and

that I am willing you should try. But if I am going to ask favours for you, it's more respectable to say that we are engaged."

"What favours are you going to ask?"

"I'll wait till I can see whether I can get them first," was Colin's canny rejoinder.

On the following Saturday, it being his half-holiday, he impressed upon Christina that he was giving up a fine bicycle ride on her behalf, and that he expected her to be grateful.

"I'll see first what you get," was Christina's reply.

Colin put on his best clothes, and took a tramway car to the hotel, so as not to spoil his boots. He picked his way to the front door and asked if Lady Anne Drummond was in just now.

The man said he would see, and looking doubtfully at Colin, asked if he had any message, or should he give her ladyship his name?

"Just say her cousin wants to see her," said Colin.

Lady Anne came into the room in some perplexity. She shook hands with her guest, and then said, "The waiter—did I understand the waiter to say that you had brought a message from some cousin of mine?"

Lady Anne had a cousin who was ranching in Canada, and she wondered if he had sent home some message, or, perhaps, an offering of skins, such as Colonials send to their relatives at home, by the hand of a friendly settler dressed in homely raiment, and with the face of an Apollo.

"Sit down," said Colin kindly; and Lady Anne obediently seated herself.

"I understand that you are thinking you will have to let Poplar's Court?" said Colin.

"We have hardly decided upon that," said Lady Anne a little haughtily. Then bethinking herself of the impoverished state of the family acres, and that only too soon would they and the old big house indeed have to be let, she swallowed her pride, or as much of it as she could, and said, "Our agents are Messrs. Mure and Brydell, if you care to hear any particulars about the place."

Colin laughed joyously. "I'm not thinking of taking the place," he said. "I'm an electrical engineer."

"Indeed," said Lady Anne.

"This is a sort of delicate subject," began Colin gravely; and remembering his advice to Christina—"I should like to say at the onset that I am not pitying you. I know fine that you will like to say when you let the big house that you are just etting to go abroad for a year, and I am no the one to go against that saying, so far as my conscience purrmits. But before I proceed, I wad like to prove the relationship, for that is the only way that the subject can be approached with suffeecient delicacy."

"I do not think I quite understand," said poor Lady Anne,

"I do not blame you for that," said Colin reassuringly. "You see," clearing his throat, and, with great delicacy, directing his gaze out of the window, "my grandmother's sister was married to your grandfather; only there was such a to-do about the marriage, and Gretna Green being, as I understand, a sore trouble to you all; furthermore, the family being kind to my grandmother's sister,

once they knew the marriage could no be put on one side, we thought we would ease you by not claiming the relationship—though I'll admit that I have made traffic with it in the case of Christina."

"You are one of the M'Craes, I suppose," said Lady Anne. The thought crossed her mind that perhaps it was from her grandmother that she got her beauty; and some feeling of kinship awoke in her, and she smiled kindly upon the young man.

"I am very pleased you take the situation so well," said Colin.

Lady Anne thanked him.

"I'm engaged to Christina," said Colin, "*provisionally*. If she can get any one better with her money, I'll not stand in her way."

That seemed fair enough from a commercial point of view, only Lady Anne had never heard a case stated quite so frankly.

"You see," said Colin, "she has now got eighteen thousand a year."

Lady Anne gasped. In the present state of her own family exchequer the sum named almost staggered her. "Dear me!" she said, "that is a large, an immense fortune, is it not?"

"It's colossal," said Colin gravely. "Now, the first thing we have both thought of," he continued, "is to get her educate in the English—not to say the aristocratic tone. I would like it if I married her myself, and I'd like it still more if she gets a lord."

Such reasonableness was a little staggering, but that it was reasonableness could not be denied.

"She is twenty-one, and too old to go to school."

" Yes ? "

" Otherwise we thought a year at a Brighton seminary for young ladies would have helped her."

" Is she—that is, has her education been neglected ? " asked her ladyship.

" I'll not deceive you. Christina has got all the rudiments of education, and passed first at the High School in most of the subjects. But, obsairve—you will not have nawticed it, perhaps—that I speak with a wee bit of a Scotch accent ? Well, Christina's is just awful ! I felt it, even when I was engaged to her myself, and what a lord would think of it I really dawn't know."

And this conversation he faithfully repeated to Christina the very next time that they met.

Lady Anne was a little puzzled. " What lord is it that she thinks of marrying ? " she asked. " Is it any one I know ? "

" She has not, so to say, met him yet," answered Colin ; " but we think if she went to London she might do so. It's a lord that Christina is set on, and if her money will get her one, I think she has every right to choose for herself."

" It's—it's very kind of you to tell me all this," said Lady Anne, by way of gracefully leading the conversation to some point that would show why she had been consulted upon the subject.

" It's pure self-interest," said Colin.

" You wanted me to help in some way, to—to tell you of some school ? "

" We have given up the idea of a school. No, it would have to be by mixing with people. Christina

knows some good families, but she does not mix with them. It's mixing that does it. And she is no so pretty as she was. She ought to mix and get her chances as soon as she can."

"I should be very happy if you would bring her to call," said Lady Anne kindly. "Perhaps she would like me to introduce her to a few people?"

"Not in Lumboro'!" said Colin decisively. "Christina is going to shake the very dust of the city off her feet."

There followed a silence of some minutes' duration. Colin had been wearing a very large bowler hat, which he still held in his hands, and this he slowly turned round and round. And then he began to pick the ribbon off it, while large beads of perspiration stood upon his brow, and his eyes assumed a troubled expression.

He rose suddenly, and laid his hat upon the table. "If I am to save that hat," he remarked, "I'll need to speak at once." Then,—

"You will please to remember that I am a relation——"

"Oh yes!" Lady Anne gave another of her kind smiles.

"And that I feel very sorely that Poplar's Court is to be let."

"That is very kind of you."

"I think I'll write," he said.

Lady Anne put her hand kindly upon his arm. "I think," she said, "that I begin to see what you want to say."

"I hope you do," said Colin, "for it would be fearsome work beginning again."

“ You want to suggest that Miss—I am afraid I don't know her name yet ? ”

“ M'Nab,” said Colin; “ but she's going to spell it with two ' b's.' ”

“ That Miss M'Nab would like to come and live with us for a time, and see some society, before she goes into the larger world of London ; is not that so ? I believe that such things are often done now ; but you will understand that I cannot arrange anything of that sort quite suddenly. I must ask Mr. Drummond what he thinks ; and, perhaps, you will bring Miss M'Nab to call upon us when he comes to Lumboro'.”

“ This is more,” said Colin, “ than I thought you would do at first. Indeed, you might have shown me to the door ! ”

“ Why, you are my cousin ! ” said Lady Anne.

CHAPTER II.

“OBJECT to having a girl with twenty thousand a year in your house ! Object to a girl who offers, who presses two thousand a year upon you for the privilege of living in the dullest house in England ! O Lord, my dear Anne, I wouldn’t object to the girl if she were a Malay ! I wouldn’t object to her if she were bad, mad, genteel—anything you like. We will have some of the rooms papered, and give her a good time. Two thousand a year ! By Gad, it’s a special providence ! I’ll go to church next Sunday, and say the General Thanksgiving from beginning to end. I’ll——”

“You must not sell horses to her, Dick—that is the one stipulation I make ; and we must give Miss M’Nab the opportunity of marrying well. She wants to marry a lord, she says.”

“She may marry Southwark if she likes ! Give your brother the first chance, Anne ; twenty thousand a year, even if made in tubes, ought not to be allowed to go out of the family.”

“You forget poor Muriel,” said Lady Anne.

Christina, meanwhile, was buying two new dresses for her visit, and debating within herself whether or not she could make her last winter’s jacket serve till the warm weather came, or if she would have to get a new one. She sat in the little gas-lit parlour at nights and wrote down an account of all the money she had

spent, and trembled. "It's awful to spend so much on clothes," she said to Colin M'Crae, when he came in one evening with his workman's cap stuck on the back of his head, and his hand grimy with work. "Twenty pounds just runs away afore you know where you are, and I used to have to make twenty pounds do me the whole year."

"Twenty pounds!" laughed Colin. "Christina, have ye got a sealskin jacket and a new silk umbrella? Have ye got patent leather boots and a velvet dress? Twenty pounds! I suppose my cousin, Lady Anne, would spend that on a single dress."

"I can't bring myself to spend the money, and that's a fact," said Christina. She began to cry a little. "It fears me," she said, "and I feel whiles as if a judgment would fall on me."

"Buy some fine gowns furst," said Colin.

"I know my trunk is far through," Christina went on, "but I might make it do. And suppose I were to get a new one, what would I do with my old one?"

"You might get four shillings for it if you sold it," said Colin, with a sniff. "Christina M'Nab, are you aware that you should be spending over fifty pounds a day to get through all you have got to get through?"

"I can't do it," said Christina; "it fears me."

She invited Colin to stay and have tea with her, as it was her last night; and Jessie coming in to clear the table and set the tea-things, they partook of scones and cold meat together for the last time. Jessie had suggested roasting a chicken in honour of the occasion. "Then how is the cold meat to get eaten?" asked

Christina, gravely conclusive. "Are you preaching sinful waste like Mr. M'Crae?" she asked.

"Here's luck!" said Colin, smiling at her over the rim of his tea-cup; but Christina's courage had failed her to-night.

"Colin," she said wistfully, "I wish you were going to see me through."

"I've no been invited," said Colin, in his literal way; "but I'll write to you whiles, and give you instructions how to behave——"

"Juist daur!" from Christina.

"And I'll come to the station and see you off to-morrow. Mind you to take a first-class ticket: I'll not have my folk disgraced!"

Mr. Drummond came to London himself to meet his guest, and found Christina where she stood beside her shabby trunk all forlorn at Euston Station. The trunk was marked "C. M.," and Mr. Drummond gave himself great credit for having noticed this. He bustled up in a jerky, fussy, kindly way that he had. "Look here, my dear," he said, for that was his invariable mode of addressing a pretty girl; "look here, my dear child"—the girl was so excessively pretty that he added the "child"—"are you Miss M'Nab's maid? and can you tell me which the dickens is she, and where her luggage is?"

Poor Christina made no answer.

"So awf'ly sorry," jerked Mr. Drummond—"no impertinence, I assure you; looking for a lady, and have no more idea what she is like than the man in the moon. 'C. M.' on your box, you know!" He lifted his hat, and was bustling off again when Christina, with her

heart full and the tears very near her eyes, said primly and severely, "I am Miss M'Nab!"

"Oh, my only aunt!" said Mr. Drummond, putting up both his hands to his head with a tragic gesture. "Don't tell Anne," he added; but Christina was too cross to speak.

"Where is your maid?" asked Mr. Drummond desperately. ("She will give me away to Anne, and say that I called her 'my dear child.' I do wish I could learn not to play the ass.")

"I left my maid at home," said Christina promptly. Undoubtedly Jessie was a "maid," and she was at this moment at Christina's old home in Murchison Street; but Christina was loaded with a sense of guilt, and the burden of falsehood begat in her a feeling of irritation. "It's all the fault of London," she was saying to herself, "and this ridiculous little Englishman. I'm ashamed to be contaminated already."

"Well, we must find the rest of your luggage," rattled on Mr. Drummond, fidgeting from one foot to another. "I ought to have brought my man; he's a good sort, my man. I call him my moral censor. Nearly every one I know is my moral censor, Miss M'Nab, so the same name applies to every one, which saves a deal of trouble. Now, then, I've got a brougham here. It ought to be here, at least; but he has fled, because he is an hireling! There he is! You just get in and sit tight, will you, Miss M'Nab? and I'll collect the baggage. What initials, eh?"

"This is my luggage," said Christina severely.

"Capital, capital. The maid bringing the rest, I suppose? No bike or anything? Why, you are a

trump, Miss M'Nab, a perfect trump ! ” He was becoming quite cheerful again, and having settled himself in the brougham, remarked genially, “ What a wife you would make ! ”

No reply suggesting itself to Christina, she remained silent. Also, she was engaged in mentally condemning Colin for not having told her that Mr. Drummond was mad.

“ And you had a comfortable journey, and no babies in the carriage or anything beastly of that sort ? ” Mr. Drummond frequently assumed in this way some statement that had never been made, and hardly troubled to add an illuminating mark of interrogation afterwards.

“ The journey was not comfortable,” said Christina, “ although ”—impressively—“ I travelled first-class.”

“ And felt all the time, ‘ There are those lucky brutes who like travelling third-class ; they’ve spent half the money, and arrived just as soon.’ I know that feeling so well.”

Christina felt that it would be useless to remark that no such thought had been hers, so she remained silent ; and Mr. Drummond told her twice in rapid succession that she was dead-tired, that she had had a beastly lunch and was feeling as homesick as a cat, and that he was deuced sorry this should be so, but she would feel better when she had seen Anne.

“ I should like awfully to unpack for you,” he said, in a kind, fussing way, when they reached the hotel, “ but ’pon my word, I don’t know if Anne would think it the right thing ; but I’ll send my man to you if that would be any good,” he added.

Christina thanked him in a chilly voice, and said she

could "do for herself." She removed her very unbecoming hat and shook out her lovely hair, which she fastened in a big knot at the back of her head. Her eyes were heavy with fatigue and big with loneliness, and she looked so beautiful when she entered the coffee-room for a late dinner that every one's head was turned towards her.

"By George!" exclaimed Mr. Drummond. "Oh, I say—perhaps I had better not say what I was going to say—but, by Jove, you know, Miss M'Nab, you will knock 'em all over, you know. Gad, you will!"

He passed the whole of dinner-time in bestowing jerky, spasmodic attentions upon his guest, in abusing his own indiscretions, and in wondering painfully what Anne would say.

"I ordered champagne, Miss M'Nab; I hope that is what you like. Just say if you would prefer claret or anything."

"Thank you," said Christina; "I do not taste."

As this remark was unintelligible to the Englishman, he continued to pour the liquid into Christina's glass, who presently remarked that he was just wasting good wine for which many a poor person would be thankful.

Mr. Drummond looked distressed and embarrassed. He remarked in a tone of gravity that the "paw" were always with us—so they were, by Jove, even the Bible said that; and although he knew that Miss M'Nab was thinking that a sinner like himself had no business to quote Scripture, still the thing was a fact—he studied the "paw"-law a good bit himself.

"I hope he is harmless," thought Christina. She explained in fuller terms that she did not drink wine, and

added the rider "that all ladies were to be condemned who did so."

"I don't quite see what else they are to drink," said poor Mr. Drummond, "everything else is so beastly. A glass of water always has such a depressing appearance, and lemonade makes you feel so sort of aerated and queer."

He seemed a little crushed in spirit, and remained very quiet and subdued till the end of dinner. Christina sat opposite to him without speaking. She had her purse, her bedroom door-key, and a small box containing a few trinkets on her knee, and these she held securely whenever the waiter came near. "London is such an awfully wicked place," she was thinking. "I've told a lie myself before I have been in it ten minutes, and there is no saying what these poor men who have been brought up in it will do." Her own lie weighed heavily upon her, and she thought of nothing but it the whole of dinner-time.

"Would you like to go to your room now?" asked Mr. Drummond, when the meal was ended; "there's no hurry about goin' down to Popples to-morrow. Have a comfy bit of breakfast in bed, and we can wire to Anne, and go down when you feel inclined."

"I have just the one maid," said Christina, lifting adorable white eyelids, and speaking in a little mincing way which she called English, "and she is not a leddy's-maid——"

"She'll improve, she'll improve," said Mr. Drummond hopefully; "that is what I always say to Anne, 'They'll improve.' Bless you, why, I have improved myself?"

“——I have just one box, and I am not expecting Jessie to follow me. Good-night!”

She went up to her room with her face flushed, muttering crossly to herself, “Making such a like fool of myself, and all for the sake of a maid too! Colin was just a sumph not to tell me I ought to have had a maid. Well, if I get one in England, it will save the expense of bringing her from Scotland. But the deil will not catch me telling lies again; it’s just a ridiculous occupation.”

Mr. Drummond, meanwhile, was dashing off a few lines to his wife:—

“MY DARLING ANNE,—I hope it is all right about the heiress; she seems a bit cracked, but fearfully pretty. I am in a cold sweat when I think she may not have the dollars after we have got those rooms papered.” (Mr. Drummond spent large sums like a millionaire, but was addicted to cold sweats and fearful tremblings at the most unexpected times, and at the expenditure of very small sums.) “I wish you had been able to come and meet her, as, of course, it’s beastly for her being met by a fool like me. She hangs on to her purse and her door-key all the time, and seems hard up; but I vote we have her down, all the same, and give her a good time for a bit. Perhaps she would pay for the papers anyway; and we could say the drains are wrong, or something, if she turns out to be a fraud—she is pretty enough for anything. God bless you, my sweet!

“DICK.

“You might ask a parson or two to dine soon; she seems awfully strict, and likes talking about the poor.

“ I open this to add that she is a teetotaler. I can't make out if that means that she drinks nothing, like a camel, or if she only drinks things that don't do you a mite of good. Tell John not to sing comic songs for the first night or two. D. D.”

Christina slept with her purse under her pillow, and gave the chambermaid a shilling upon leaving.

The next morning she awoke at Poplar's Court, known in the vernacular of society as “ Popples.” A housemaid, built up of starch and respectability, who overnight had inquired of her whether she would take coffee, chocolate, or tea in the morning, brought to her bedside a little tray with French rolls and butter upon it, and a silver coffee-pot. She proceeded to light the fire and draw back the curtains, while Christina lay and watched her with big, sleepy eyes, and thought how large the room was, and hoped it was not wicked to be so luxurious and to lie in bed drinking *café au lait* when the winter sun was shining and folk were getting to work. The housemaid, whose dress crackled as she walked, then removed the tray, and asked if she should turn on the bath. “ Your own bathroom is next door, ma'am ; and will you breakfast downstairs or have it brought up here ? ”

“ They seem to think one is very helpless,” thought Christina. “ I'll can turn on my own bath, thank you.” she said, “ and I'll breakfast downstairs.”

She missed her way to the breakfast-room, and, led by voices, found herself in the library, where Mr. Drummond, with a large Bible in front of him and a countenance of the acutest distress, was expostulating loudly

with his wife. "Look here, Anne, this is a terrible chapter that is coming; really I can't read it. Hang it, you know, I'm not a parson! If I had a white gown and all that, it would help me."

"Good-morning," said Christina.

"Good-morning. Awf'ly glad to see you down and looking so fit. You are thinking how beastly the first morning in a strange house is; I know that feeling so well. But stick to it—stick to it; you can get accustomed to anything! Please don't stay to prayers.—This will never do, I am afraid," rumpling up his hair wildly from his forehead; "I must take refuge in the Psalms again to-day, Anne."

Lady Anne crossed the room gently, and came and stood by the big library chair, leaning over her husband and turning the leaves of the book with her fair hand. "Read this, Dickie," she said, indicating a chapter for him. He kissed her hand before he let her go, and murmured a word of love.

Then the servants came trooping in, and sat on long benches at the far end of the room; while their master, leaning both his elbows on the open page, and shoving his hands through his hair, rapped out the verses in a series of short, sharp barks. Two collects followed in quite a headlong fashion, and Mr. Drummond rose from his knees with a very red face, avoided the eyes of the whole congregation, and shut the Bible with a bang.

"I do it to please Anne," he said, when he was taking Christina for a "walk round the place" after breakfast. "Fact is, you know," he went on with the almost alarming frankness that distinguished him—"fact is, you know, I'm a reformed rake, Miss M'Nab; that is

what I am. At least I am reforming; you couldn't live with Anne without reforming. Anne Drummond is the best woman that God ever put on earth; I don't care who the second is. You break out a bit—you can't help it if you are a reformed rake—she forgives you every time, and she will pray for you like anything when you are playing the goat all the time!”

The little man's eyes were filled with tears, and there was an awkward silence.

“I'll tell you another thing about her,” Mr. Drummond continued more cheerfully: “she never draws the rein a bit too tight. I say I want to see some of my old pals; Anne says, ‘All right.’ So we have them down, and I paint the place red and blue for a bit, and so do they. Well, when that's over I'm all right again for a time. Then I say, ‘I'm awf'ly sorry, Anne;’ and she says, ‘It's all right, Dickie;’ and after that you don't feel as if you'd ever break out again as long as you both do live, as the Prayer Book says.”

Christina said, “Oh, indeed!” in a conventional, prim way; and Dick went indoors and told his wife that if Miss M'Nab were not so thundering pretty he'd be d——d if he'd stand her!

“She is shy, I think,” said Lady Anne.

“I believe she is trying to put on side,” quoth her lord; “and why the dickens does she speak in that prunes and prisms sort of way? Bless me, I like the girl most awfully—really I do—and it would be horribly awkward if she doesn't stay long enough to cover, as you may say, the wall-papers. But why does she let off two words at you, and then hold her fire for the next half-hour?”

"Colin M'Crae told me she was very anxious to get rid of her Scottish accent; perhaps that explains it."

"She is a fool, I think—just a beautiful fool!"

"Joan takes to her, I think," said Anne diplomatically.

"Does she?—does Joan take to her? Well, I never knew Joan make a mistake yet. Hi, Joan! Where is the child?—Joan, come here, and tell me what you think of the P. G."

Miss Joan Drummond was aged seven years, and had already learned to imitate her father exactly, and to speak his slang.

"She is not a thoroughbred un," said Miss Joan, propping her chin on her hands, "but she will do."

"A bit awkward at starting, eh?" laughed her father. "You are a precocious child, Joan, and you have no business to criticize your mother's guests. Remember, you have got to be nice to her: you would hate to be in a strange house yourself. Now go away and play about."

Presently Christina came in, and sat down primly on the edge of the sofa. She still wore her walking dress of black cashmere, made with little dabs and tabs of black silk, and a hat with feathers. She remarked laboriously that it was a fine morning, and that several puddles in the garden were covered with ice.

Lady Anne left her writing-table, and came over with some work in her hand and took a chair beside the girl.

"You must tell me about your home and how you left Colin," she said kindly.

"Mr. M'Crae is very well," minced Christina.

"How much interested he seems to be in his work! He ought to get on well, I am sure."

"I do not think that electrical engineering is at all the work for a gentleman," said Christina grandly.

This remark seemed to bring the conversation to an end. Lady Anne began another that promised better.

"Had you many friends in Lumboro'?" asked the kind voice.

"Very few," replied Christina; "and I think this will be an advantage later on, for I do not mean to let on—I mean, allow—that I come from Lumboro'."

This seemed a little odd—unless, indeed, there were family reasons for wishing an old home forgotten. Lady Anne bowed her head courteously.

"I know two families who kept their carriage," volunteered Christina. "One of them was quite English."

"I fear all my prejudices are Scottish," smiled Lady Anne. "I love the people with their straightforward ways and their sincerity and goodness. Your nationality must be a great bond of sympathy between us, Miss M'Nab."

"You speak so pure," said Christina admiringly. "I would never guess you were Scotch."

"But I love the Scottish tongue best," laughed Lady Anne, "and I can read Crockett's books without a dictionary."

"Oh, indeed!" said Christina.

Lady Anne began again. "Do you care for riding? The country about here is considered very pretty, and if you care about it, we can mount you until you buy a horse for yourself. Shall you hunt while you are with us?"

Christina, still sitting bolt upright upon the edge of the sofa, replied, "I don't ride, thank you; but"—with the usual qualifying clause—"I know several young ladies who do."

This seemed obvious.

"We must teach you to ride," said Lady Anne kindly. "Dick would enjoy it of all things, and we have an old cob that inspires every one with confidence."

"I have always heard that riding is very expensive," said Christina.

Golf? Golf was a Scottish game, and no doubt Christina was proficient in it. Dick was busy making links, and several putting-greens were already turfed.

"I do not golf," said Miss M'Nab; "but it is quite a fashionable pastime for ladies."

The morning passed in laborious conversation and still more laborious silences. "Oh," thought poor Lady Anne, "I wonder if she will sit on the edge of the sofa and snub me the whole time she is here? Shall I learn to know what are fashionable pastimes and what are not? and shall we all have to be genteel?"

To visit with any degree of comfort in country houses, it is necessary to understand and to speak in the proper formula. "Have you any letters to write?" from a hostess to a guest means, "I am busy, or tired of you, and should feel obliged if you would go to your room or elsewhere for a bit." "I have letters to write," from a guest to a hostess means, "I am tired of sitting about and conversing, and should like to go and sit over my bedroom fire with a novel, and if possible go to sleep till it is time for the next meal." "What are your plans?" from host to guest is properly translated by,

"When are you going to take yourself off?" and "I must return to town on business," is the polite way of saying, "I am bored, and do not intend to stay with you any longer." An obstinate guest may sometimes be helped to take his departure by an order that "the carriage may be wanted for the station to-day," given in his hearing to the coachman. "We are very quiet people down here," means, "We are deadly dull, so please don't expect amusement." "I like quiet, thank you," can be rendered by, "I have nowhere else to go at present." "Will you have a fire in your room?" in winter is superfluous, and can only mean gratuitous cruelty or a dearth of housemaids. To reply, "I don't feel the cold, thank you," proclaims the poor relation who has learnt to put up with everything. There are so many other formulæ that a printed code with proper translations should be made and hung in guest-chambers.

"Have you any letters you would like to write before lunch?" said Lady Anne; "our post leaves at three o'clock."

"No, thank you," said Christina. "I thought I would not write to Colin until there is more to say."

Lady Anne flushed all over her dear face. "We are hoping to have some friends down here to stay with us soon; but Dick and I thought that perhaps you would rather be alone with us at first, until you began to know us better and feel at home."

"So I would," said Christina; "I think you get the tone better." And she added, "Then I think I will go and write to Colin now."

She went upstairs to her own pretty sitting-room, with its books and pictures, and its deep oriel window over-

looking the finely-timbered park, and here she took her pen and wrote :—

“DEAR COLIN,—It is just awful being with grand folk, and they have no sense at all. Mr. Drummond is that English you would hardly understand what he says ; and he has no reserve at all, and yet there is something so stand-offish, too, that you don't know what to do with him. Lady Anne is just the same, for all she is so sweet ; you just feel all the time that she is trying not to let you know that there is any difference between you, and that makes it worse. I'll never get the tone, I am afraid, mix with them how I like.

“They think I ought to have a maid, and I don't know what besides ; you might send Jessie. I think third-class would do, and she can sleep at her sister's in London. They have a cousin—a most godless man. Mr. Drummond told such stories last night, and all about Presbyterian ministers, and rubbish that they never said in their sermons ! Mr. Drummond wanted the cousin to sing comic songs in the drawing-room after dinner, and said to me, ‘Do you mind, Miss M'Nab ?’ And I said I did not think they were the thing for the drawing-room ; so he gave over. Talk about their poverty ! I never saw such sinful waste in all my life ! They are just spendthrifts in some ways, and near in others. I think Mr. Drummond sells horses, which is most ungentleman-like ; he said he ‘made the gees pay a bit.’ I hope he is honest.

“The cousin they call John is a cripple—he should be thinking of serious things ; but, indeed, there is never a word of sense spoken. You might have warned

me about a maid—you that is full of knowledge of the aristocracy; it was just awful at the station. Tell Jessie to bring me another trunk as large as she can get; she can put some of her own things into it to fill it. I'll be real glad to have her, and there is a grand room for her quite near my own.

“England is very dull and fearfully wicked; there is not a body you can trust; and I lost a shilling in the hotel in London.—Your affectionate friend,

“CHRISTINA M'NAB.”

This letter Christina immediately tore up into little pieces, and taking another sheet of superfine notepaper, she began :—

“DEAR MR. M'CRAE,—I arrived here quite safely last night, and was met by a carriage and pair, and a cart for my luggage. Please send my maid to me, and ask her to buy and bring with her a new trunk, as I find I have not enough. (Jessie can't read, so there is no use writing to her.) Lady Anne is most agreeable and charming, and I am made quite one of the family. My suite of rooms is elegant and commodious. I must now stop, as the luncheon gong has sounded; and although we all think that lunch is a movable feast, and come down when we like, I think I shall now join the family.

“With kind regards, and hoping you get on well with your work,—Yours truly, CHRISTINA M'NAB.”

“Poor lassie, poor lassie,” said Colin, smiling, “she is near heart-broken with homesickness and the strangeness of it all! But she will get on,” he added proudly; “I have no doubt of Christina, and I am real pleased with this fine letter she has wrote.”

CHAPTER III.

THE next day was Sunday, and Lady Anne asked Christina if she would like to go to church.

"Oh, certainly," said Christina; "I am going to be Episcopal now." This showed a great advance on Christina's part—a shaking off of old trammels, and a distinct lift into higher circles and a more aristocratic life.

In Lumboro' we consider that the English Church savours of Popery and the theatre. Papas think their flock are better and safer in the Presbyterian fold, and it is a fearful thing, and shows discontent with your station in life, if you attend the Episcopal Communion.

St. Margaret's Church is aristocratic, English—perhaps slightly frivolous—and when you first assert your independence, and break away from mamma and papa and the *Church Hymnal*, it is a test of your strength of character if you can walk up the middle aisle of Lumboro's chief Episcopal church without making a dash for your seat, or edging to the right hand or to the left to get the protection which is afforded by creeping along near the pews. A young man surely will hardly refrain from biting his moustache as he follows the verger along that strip of cocoanut matting, while a young lady—in all the shyness that a strange and doubtful proceeding involves—will settle the hairpins in her back plaits or twitch nervously at her veil.

Evening service at St. Margaret's with Colin was one

of the first liberties that Christina had allowed herself, and she had felt a thrill of sinful excitement at the fact of worshipping by gaslight at seven o'clock !

"Father always forbade it," she whispered to Colin at the door.

"Hoots ! you must have some amusement," Colin had replied, "and it is not expensive."

To forsake entirely the Church of her father and forefathers was now Christina's fixed and ambitious intention, and she dressed for the morning service at the village church with a pleasurable thrill of excitement. But the walk to Hoeford in the pouring rain was damping in more senses than one, and Christina thought the country a very comfortless place, and longed for a tramway car. Mr. Drummond looked depressed. He walked, as he talked, in jerks, and picked his way along the muddy lanes with his trousers turned up very high, and a distraught expression upon his whimsical, colourless face. Joan, the child, bobbed along with dancing curls and very short frocks, turning round at intervals to make remarks, and thereby endangering the safety of every one's eyes with her umbrella.

"I think it is very good of us to go to church on a day like this," she remarked, whisking round and sending a shower of raindrops on to Christina's crape.

"It is particularly good of me," said her father, "for I consider it wrong."

"Mr. Weeks has got a cold," hazarded Joan. "I do hope we shall have the curate only ; he goes so fast."

"It is Mr. Weeks's turn for a cold," said Mr. Drummond, in a dejected sort of way. "I have never known the entire family of Weeks to be free from catarrh."

They entered the churchyard through a lich-gate, and walked past dripping moss-green gravestones to the porch. Mr. Drummond shook his umbrella and turned down the collar of his coat. "Sit near me," he whispered to Christina; "I don't feel good, and Anne has got to play the organ to-day." He caught his wife's hand as she was passing through a side door to the organ-loft. "Wave your hand to me over the curtain sometimes," he whispered; "old Weeks is going to preach, and I am so unhappy."

Christina unpinned her skirts, which she had held carefully out of the wet, and paused in the aisle. "Would you kindly tell me which is your pew?" she asked.

"Loose-box on the left," said Mr. Drummond in a loud voice. "Count how many servants there are in the pew behind you; I'm not supposed to look round."

The little church was sparsely filled, and smelt unpleasantly damp and mouldy. "Not mould; my ancestors," said Mr. Drummond, detecting a little sniff from Christina. "'Useless when alive, dangerous when dead'—that's the epitaph I invented for 'em!"

Joan gave a suppressed giggle, but Christina's sense of decorum rose superior to humour. "Not that one can feel releegious in an English church," she was saying to herself, "but it's not genteel to laugh."

She looked about her furtively: the walls were covered with damp-stains and monuments of the Drummond family, and over her head on the wall, in front of the huge square pew, there were some tattered regimental colours and a suit of mail. "That tin suit was found in the moat," said Mr. Drummond, following the direc-

tion of Christina's eyes. Christina drew down her veil, and inclined her head stiffly.

Mr. Drummond's depression seemed to increase. His eyebrows were raised higher than usual, and almost disappeared in his sandy hair. He kept fidgeting about to try and see the red curtains of the organ-loft; and presently, before the service began, Anne Drummond drew a corner of the baize aside, and smiled down upon her husband. "Bless her," murmured Dick. The curtain was redrawn, and the voluntary was played with much taste and sweetness. A score of little boys in surplices of doubtful cleanliness, and a variety of knickerbockers, stockings, and muddy boots, showing beneath on their uncassocked legs, shuffled noisily out of the vestry, their rear being brought up by the vicar with a cold in his head, and a tall, lank curate, black-haired, and reported "High."

Directly the service began Mr. Drummond unfastened his watch from its chain, and laid it on the table in the middle of the pew. The curate began reading with extraordinary rapidity, but the vicar dropped his words one by one in a hopelessly melancholy way. "Oh," groaned Mr. Drummond, "if he would only have a good cry and be done with it!" The choir boys fidgeted, and ate sweets in an audible, succulent manner, and the singing was as bad and as careless as it often is in English village churches. The women servants and village girls criticized each other's hats, and the men slept. Only up in the organ-loft Anne Drummond's face seemed filled with a light such as did not shine on other faces, and her playing of the simple chants conveyed a sense of holiness which the rest of the service lacked.

"We talk the Psalms now," whispered Mr. Drummond, who was accommodating in giving information all through the service: "choir boys won't come to choir practice; choir practice wants organist; organist wants his fire at night; so the pig won't get over the stile, and so on—you know the rest, Miss M'Nab!"

Christina lost her way several times in her prayer-book, and was relieved when it came to sermon-time. She prayed with a handkerchief held to her face in a black-gloved hand. "Part of the ritual of the Scot," murmured Dickie; "it used to puzzle me at first in the north." Mr. Drummond kept a keen eye upon his watch, and began to click the cover of it with a snap as soon as the hands pointed to 12.15. Snap, snap went the spring of the watch-case, and poor Mr. Weeks began to speak with a sort of melancholy irritation. The curate sat biting his nails, and the choir boys played little games of their own. The discourse ended lamely, and Mr. Drummond bustled out of the pew to collect the offertory. This was the only part of the service that he really enjoyed, and he took the keenest interest in the amount offered by each person in the congregation.

The "High" curate always returned to Poplar's to lunch, and in the afternoon he and his host began to play billiards. Christina, scandalized, fled in haste to the morning-room, only to find Lady Anne sitting by John Churchill's couch—he being ill to-day—and playing chess with him. "Where have I got to?" Christina said to herself, retreating upstairs to her room; "this is an awful house!"

She opened her Bible and read it resolutely, keeping an attentive ear open to any sound of carnal levity that

should be heard about the house. Presently she heard the door of the billiard-room open, followed by the burst of conversation that heralded all Mr. Drummond's movements, reminding one somewhat of the rush and noisy delight of a dog let loose.

"You gave me a regular good licking; bravo the Church, I say!—Hi, Joan, Joan! where is the child?—You see, you High Church parsons, you never eat anything, and you never drink anything, and that is why your hands are so steady.—Joan, get on your boots this minute, and come for a walk! Ask Miss M'Nab to come too. Hang it! we must try and be nice to a guest, and she may like to see the mokes. Run along."

A flying chase brought both these irrepressible persons to Christina's door, and then there seemed to be a moment's pause for composure. Then Joan knocked demurely, and said, "Papa's love (Mr. Drummond's flying feet could be heard taking him headlong down the staircase)—"papa's love, and will you care to come out for a walk, and see the horses and the pigs?"

Christina said, "No, thank you;" and Joan flung both her arms round her neck, and said, "You sweet thing, do come!" This was a little embarrassing to our undemonstrative friend, who blushed slightly, and said, "Hoots, give over."

"I like you so much," Joan proceeded, scrambling on to Christina's knee; and she continued, "I mean often to come up here and sit with you. It's rather a relief getting away from papa sometimes, when he is fussy. I shall come and sleep with you sometimes, and you can tell me stories. Do you ever have funny dreams? I do. I dreamt last night that nurse's uncle

stood in the middle of our paddock and held the moon in a saucer. Do you ever dream things like that? How old are you? I should think about forty; but you never can tell. May I stretch all your new gloves before you put them on? it is the thing I like doing best."

Christina checked the flow of conversation by remarking "that little girls should be seen and not heard." At which wise old saw the modern child screamed with delighted laughter, called Christina "too sweet and dear for anything," and jumping down from her knee, went to prepare for her walk.

"What a chatter!" soliloquized, when left to herself, the lady of Scottish blood and few words; "I wonder their tongues don't tire. But I suppose everything depends upon what you are used to. That's a queer-like child, and a little daft, I am afraid, like her poor father."

Her head drooped over her big Bible, and the heavy calm white lids closed on sleepy eyes, and Christina slept till tea-time. ~

When the little party assembled for tea in the great oak hall which was one of the chief beauties of the house, John Churchill said to Christina, "You have been sleeping over a good book." Christina considered Mr. Churchill a most disagreeable man. His position in the house puzzled her a good deal. Why did John Churchill live there? Why was he lame? Why was it that everything he said was greeted with laughter and applause? Why was it so frequently suggested that he should sing one of his ripping comic songs, whereas he never sang? To the ordinary observer Mr. Churchill appeared to be a sad man; but poor Dickie (perhaps it was part of his daftness) seemed to pass his time in describing to

his friends with almost pathetic emphasis how John was a very devil of a fellow. A day's outing with old John ! Tells a better story than any chap I know ! And ride ! why, of course, he does not ride at present, poor old man ; but we'll be getting him into the saddle again some of these days. And ride ! why, of course, *every one* knew he was the best gentleman rider of the day ! Mr. Drummond's wildest and most improbable—nay, his most risky stories were told by him, and then ascribed to " old John over there," who looks so good, and is so bad, you know. Good old John ; the best fellow that ever walked ! And so on, in his usual rambling fashion.

Christina wanted to tell Mr. Churchill that she thought playing chess was a very much worse employment for the Sabbath than sleeping. But John's still, melancholy face, with the humour about it which seemed like the shadow of some bygone mirthfulness, always restrained the girl, and as she said to herself, " There was no one in the house who was more difficult to chat freely to." He limped across the hearth-rug now, and handed her a plate of cake from the large well-filled table by the fire of logs. The action was performed with the quiet matter-of-fact courtesy which seemed to distinguish these daft folk from Christina's former friends, and the girl was always silenced, irritated, made bashful by it, so that to-day she muttered to herself, " You cannot give them insolence ; that's the mischief of it. I would have stood up to Colin or the assistant for half that smile he gave me about sleeping ; but then, they wouldn't have handed me cake with such an air."

" John and I have been laying plots and plans this afternoon," said Lady Anne, turning towards Christina,

and speaking in her kind way to the girl. "We have been thinking that we ought to ask some people down here after Christmas.—Is that a good scheme, Dickie?" smiling at her husband.

Dick Drummond began to speak—bit his nails in an agony. "My dear Anne," he said, "my dear Anne!" and relieved his feelings by making a plunge at the log-basket and piling wood upon the fire.

Anne raised her gentle brows in white wrinkles of perplexity, but John had begun to smile quietly. "I think," he said in his slow voice, "Dickie is wondering about wall-papers."

Dick looked gratefully at him, and said, "Yes, ah, wall-papers, you know," and smiled foolishly.

"Perhaps he thinks he is a wall-paper," said Christina to herself; "I have heard of sad cases of that sort."

Anne was being decoyed by elaborate excuses "to come and look at something awfully funny in the gun-room." And once there her husband closed the door with a fine and tragic gesture, leaning against it afterwards, and demanding in a tone of keen excitement "whether any one as pretty as Christina was to be trusted; in fact, not to put too fine a point on to it, would Christina pay up?"

"I've been reckless about the wall-papers," Mr. Drummond said; "but, 'pon my soul, I should not wonder if this fortune of hers is an hallucination or something of that sort. I have always thought she was touched—always; and I believe we ought to have asked, like tradespeople, for a month's payment in advance. There's the *phone*, you know," he said—"a thing I ought never to have touched unless we were quite certain of

being paid. I do enjoy speaking through it ; but the future looks black—very black.” He gazed in a despairing way into some imaginary space of deepest gloom. “ I have a wife and child to consider, and not even the wall-papers can be paid for unless Miss M'Nab pays up.”

“ I think it is all right,” said Lady Anne, smiling. “ If her fortune is a hallucination, it is shared, at least, with my cousin, who spoke to me about her.”

“ True, true ; unless,” brilliantly, “ it is a plot got up between 'em. We must learn firmness in business matters, Anne—I feel that. But, after all, let's have the house-party, and give the poor girl a good time if we can.”

CHAPTER IV.

To gentle Anne Drummond of the calm brows—a shy woman, in spite of a certain regal air of which she was quite unconscious—the thought of a house-party was always fraught with an unexpressed but deeply-felt dismay. Dickie lost his head when guests were in the house, and Joan became a wild and unmanageable sprite ; while John seldom appeared at all, but would sit in his own rooms pleading invalidism, and only brightened by a visit from her.

She wrote her notes heroically the next morning, while Dick hung about her making suggestions. Southwark must come, of course. If the tubes and the money and all that were really a dead certainty, then their own people ought to have the first chance, so to speak—well, well, then—the first introduction to Christina M’Nab. Hang it ! there was no engagement between him and Muriel Stonor, and even if there had been it was no use their thinking of matrimony, when between them they had not two sixpences to jingle against a tombstone. And after all, Southwark was a duke, even if he were also a pauper ; and a girl whose father made tubes would be sure to like to marry a duke. Certainly, Southwark must be asked. Then there was Pat Rivers—good old Pat, one of the best ! And Bunkins would make them all roar. And Flossie This and Tilly That !

Under Dick's guidance the house party was assuming immense proportions.

Anne, with her pen poised between her fingers, laughed, and cried, "Hold, enough! or a new wing would have to be added to the house, and a new staff of servants engaged."

But Dick's hospitality, like all his qualities, bad and good, was apt, when once started, to run to extremes. He found a place in his "mind's eye," as he expressed it, for every one. "Georgie could have this room, and Evan that. Girls do not mind 'doubling up,' and certain of the dressing-rooms could serve for bedrooms. No, he thought it would hardly do to make two bites of a cherry, and divide their guests into two parties. Coal had to be thought of, lamp-oil, and such like items, which ran away with a lot of money; and the same lights, for instance, would serve for twenty people as for ten."

"I take all trouble off Anne's hands," he confided to Christina, when he took her for a walk that afternoon. "I arrange things, and see about where people are to sleep, and all that. It saves her a lot of worry, and I think of little economies which never occur to her."

The most frugal Scot will never make mention of his thrift, and shows it only in actions, and never in words. And Christina, who thought that the lamp-oil should not have been mentioned, looked contemptuous, but said nothing. She and her host were taking their usual muddy afternoon's tramp, Mr. Drummond having decided in his own mind that it was part of the contract that his guest should be entertained, and that local gossip and wet fields were, after all, the best that he

could offer her at present. Christina's habitual taciturnity gave him fine scope for his conversational powers, and at the same time enabled him to feel a high sense of satisfaction with his own conduct and his devotion to duty. This afternoon they were the bearers of a note from Anne to the vicar's wife about the blanket club, and this gave them the opportunity of walking through the village, "a cheerful promenade," as Mr. Drummond called it, and one which gave him the opportunity of conversing with his fellow-men.

"The people like it," he explained to Christina, having apologized for the fifth or sixth time for stopping to speak to some one in the village street, "if it is only 'How do you do?' and 'A pleasant day!' But I always say, Stop for a bit and shake hands. After all, we're not oysters to open our mouths only at dinner-time."

As he spoke he hailed the vicar, who was disappearing into the stationer's shop, with a "Holloa, Weeks! what's the news to-day?"

Mr. Weeks turned round in the doorway, and shook hands. "I believe there is never any news in Hoeford—at least of a cheerful kind," he replied in his tearful way. "There is a Penny Reading this evening which my wife thinks will be a success, but I myself have grave doubts on the subject. Still, we shall be very glad if you, or any of your party"—he looked at Christina, who was then introduced—"will come to it."

Mr. Drummond was delighted. "I think we had better go, eh?" he said to Christina; "it provokes a kindly feeling, don't you think so? And I think these village entertainments are always rather amusing, myself. We

shall have to dine early ; but I think these little changes in routine are rather pleasant, and I have got a capital pair of new waterproof boots, which I am rather anxious to try." His head was full of the scheme at once, and he bought tickets and stowed them in his pocket-book in a business-like manner, and with an air of keen enjoyment.

The vicar had remained poised, as it were, on one leg during this conversation, in an attitude of flight. But Mr. Drummond was delightfully oblivious of the fact that any one could possibly want to move on without having first had a little conversation.

"Children all well," he asked—"colds better? You exceeded your time by five minutes last Sunday, Weeks ; but it was a ripping good sermon that," he added, with his characteristic kindness, which never sought to base itself upon facts, but consisted only in "making things pleasant all round," as he himself expressed it. "And how is the missus? By Jove! we have a note for your missus, I believe."

Mr. Weeks (still tiptoed for flight) offered to be the bearer of the missive, but Mr. Drummond could not entertain the suggestion for a minute. He walked on hastily with Christina, and confided to her in an explanatory sort of way—"I like Mrs. Weeks, you know ; she runs at you rather, but she's a good sort, all the same. Anne finds her a little oppressive, but what I say is, If you live in the town, you choose your friends, but if you live in the country, they choose you, and you had far better make the best of them."

When they reached the vicarage door, Mr. Drummond rang the bell, and the summons had hardly died away before Mrs. Weeks herself appeared in the passage, and

rushed towards them with an effusive welcome which explained Mr. Drummond's somewhat vague term that "she ran at you rather."

"Come in, come in!" she cried, taking a hand of each in hers; and leading the way onwards, she twisted round chairs in the drawing-room with a profuseness of welcome, and gurgled forth inarticulate sounds of pleasure during each pause in the conversation.

"Do sit down—near the fire, or from it? This *is* splendid!" She beat up a silken cushion here, and arranged an antimacassar there, poked the fire vigorously, and then sat down with an air of eager anticipation which gave one the uneasy feeling that one's most brilliant efforts of conversation could not but disappoint her expectations.

Mrs. Weeks was a large, fair, handsome woman, with a face which nature had intended to be mild and impassive—nay, possibly in its own way it might have been dignified and charming; but Mrs. Weeks had decided to be bright, and she always *was* bright. Christina, in her judicial way, at once found the reason for Mr. Weeks's habitual melancholy. Mrs. Weeks had never been known to have a dull time—even in this dullest of shires. There was always something going on, she affirmed; and even when the point was pressed, and she was obliged to admit that this "something" might only have been a parish meeting, or a missionary tea, Mrs. Weeks called everything an "entertainment," and most things (condescending to a sort of elephantine attempt at slang) "too ripping for anything." She began to describe the Parish Council meeting which had taken place last night.

“ You ought to have been there, Mr. Drummond ; you would nearly have died. Oh, if *only* one had the pen of George Eliot ! There was old Stephen, don't you know, with his red scarf—such a character ! And Mills at the Bull Inn.—Miss M'Nab, you must know old Mills ; we will go and see him together, some day, you and I ; how you'd scream !—And old John Piper, with his hobnailed boots ; I always want to put him in a book. Oh, and there were a dozen others, all sitting round, don't you know, and making suggestions. Willie allowed me to look on and listen, and I would not have missed it for anything.”

Her description of the scene was not fraught with any humorous suggestion, but Mrs. Weeks had made up her mind—being led thereto by various popular books on the subject—that village life was full of entertainment, and it did not even vaguely suggest itself to her mind that the humour of that entertainment did indeed require the pen of a George Eliot to convey it to others. Mrs. Weeks's hearers—those, that is to say, who did not know her—generally found themselves waiting in a state of eager anticipation for some points of humour, some drollery which she seemed to see so plainly, but which she was evidently incapable of sharing. “ There was the great fire in the centre of the room,” she said, “ and the men's eager faces ; I assure you it was quite Rembrandtesque ! And some of the speeches were *too* quaint.”

Her enjoyment in her recital was not participated in to any great extent. Even Dick's chatter was silenced, and Christina's grave face at last provoked the playful reproof, “ Miss M'Nab, you are one of the nation who have no sense of humour.”

The remark is one which never fails to arouse the anger of a Scot. "That judgment," said Christina, "was first pronounced by an Englishman, who had made a very stupid joke, which no one could see."

Mr. Drummond began a burst of laughter, which he strangled immediately when he saw that no sarcasm was intended. But he could be seen repeating the remark to himself with a chuckle several times during tea-time, in order that he might remember it to tell to Anne.

Mrs. Weeks was delighted to hear that the Drummonds and their party were coming to the Penny Reading. "I do like when the front benches are filled," she said; and it was evident that her bright imagination had already pictured quite a brilliant audience in the Parish Hall. "I did not mean to wear my best frock, but I shall now," she whispered to Christina, in a delighted aside.

"I'm afraid it is just *me* that is the party," replied Christina, with her most aggressive truthfulness.

"Well, well, you are a party, surely, a host in yourself," said Mrs. Weeks, a little tone of disappointment showing itself in her voice. She was quite satisfied that only three persons should come from Poplar's Court, but she disliked this prosaic way of keeping to bare facts, and preferred her imaginary crowned heads in the boxes.

The children presently trooped in to tea, which was laid on a large table in the dining-room. They were a healthy, handsome lot of children, but it would seem as if the whole household of Weeks had been stricken dumb by the mother's volubility. There was silence all

round the table, save behind the tea-tray—except in the middle of the meal, when each child solemnly handed in its tea-cup with the formula, “ Bay I have a little bore tea, babbah ? ” Mr. Drummond’s account of the universal catarrh indulged in by the Weekses was no fabrication, and so omnipresent was the family complaint that it seemed it was reckoned with in the scheme of the young Weekses’ clothing. Each child wore a piece of flannel stitched into the top of its dress or jacket, showing a rim of the material at the neck. And each had a large pocket-handkerchief carefully sewed by the corner into each little pocket. It puzzled Christina at first to see each little Weeks turn its head and bend down as though to plunge beneath the table, until she discovered, by watching the child sitting next her, that no pocket-handkerchief was of sufficient length to reach the troublesome noses of the Weekses, unless they, as it were, went half-way to meet it. There was a large bottle of cough mixture on the sideboard, and seven pairs of goloshes in the hall.

Mr. Weeks’s cough—the tribal war-cry of the Weekses—was heard in the hall ; and Mr. Weeks, having unwound himself from many scarfs, came in and took a chair by the side of Christina.

“ Here we are all together,” exclaimed Mrs. Weeks, beaming delightedly round her silent family ; “ I do call this jolly ! ”

“ Very damp,” was Mr. Weeks’s sole comment, made in politely attending to Miss M’Nab.

“ Damp, you dear old goose ! ” cried his lady ; “ why, the sun was shining quite brightly this morning. Did you see the hounds pass through Mudthorpe this after-

noon? It was magnificent!—Don't you love a meet, Miss M'Nab? We must go to one together some day. I have got a dear little cart and a ripping pony; and you can't think what a pretty sight a meet is, especially when it is in some of our dear, picturesque old villages round about here. I felt as though I *must* follow this afternoon when I saw them. There were the hounds, with their heads down, and the huntsmen, don't you know, and all that. The children and I got quite excited."

It was difficult to think of any of the Weeks children being excited; and one solid-faced boy remarked in a tone of severe reproof, "*I did not get excited, babbah!*"

When the family of Weeks spoke at all it was to contradict Mrs. Weeks, while she on her part heavily if brightly trod upon all the susceptibilities of her family—playfully brushed aside, as it were, the very few observations that they ever made—and ruled with a smiling despotism her husband, her children, and even the church. His comment upon the weather having been annihilated, Mr. Weeks seemed crushed, and blew his nose sadly in solemn requiem for a remark that had been overlaid while still so small and harmless. Christina thought it was damp, and said nothing.

She was feeling the general oppression caused by Mrs. Weeks, and would have liked to go home. But it was almost impossible to persuade Dickie to leave any gathering, however small. He seemed to experience a difficulty in quitting an assembly, and even when his "good-byes" were spoken, would often linger chatting till the formality of shaking hands had to be again undergone. So having finished her

tea, and finding that no remarks were expected from her, she leant back in her chair, and contemplated life as it presented itself to her from her present standpoint. How dull it was! How dull the damp fields were, and the cold church on Sundays, and this dull country vicarage! How dull the simple retired village was, with its red roofs, its sleepy farmhouses, its muddy by-lanes where only farm wagons crawled slowly along between bare hedges, the wheels taking the same track year after year, while the driver nodded drowsily, knowing that the sleepy team knew their way as well as he did! How dull Popples was, with its evenings spent in the billiard-room, while Anne Drummond worked, Dick knocked the balls about, and Mr. Churchill limped round the table playing a more careful game! Perhaps all aristocratic people were dull; perhaps that was what being aristocratic meant! The neighbouring country-houses to which Anne had driven her to pay calls were every bit as dull as the one in which she was a guest. Christina had not been brought up to play the piano, nor to do fancy work. She had made her own clothes, had done half the housework, and had walked out with Colin M'Crae. The busy mercantile world of Lumboro' had been full of interest to her. There everybody had been busy; every one's day was full from an early breakfast till a late and often tired "good-night." Men had walked along the busy streets glancing at their watches from time to time. Leisure, when it did come, was enjoyed with as much intelligence, almost—if one might say so—with as much briskness, as work. A good cheap concert, for which the day's work had to furnish the entrance-fee,

was enjoyed with real appreciation to the last note. A bicycle ride into the country was a keen and vivid pleasure, and always had some definite object in view. No one ever rode a little way out, and came back again. No one made those aimless wanderings to get exercise. Death only seemed to come when a man had done his work, and was thoroughly and honourably tired out. Ladies had hastened into town in tramway cars to do their shopping, clad in the sealskin jacket of successful commerce, and with the stout purse of respectability firmly grasped in their hands ; no one dawdled, and few loitered at shop-windows : every one walked as though hastening to some definite goal.

Here in the Drummonds' big country-house, with its acres of peaceful park land about it, its gardens, its browsing sheep, its gray clear skies, there never seemed any manner of reason why the duty or the work of to-day should not be put off till to-morrow, till next week, or for ever. Breakfast was at nine—"a liberal nine," as Dickie expressed it—and it really did not matter whether you came down at that hour or at ten or eleven o'clock. The breakfast was still hot, and it merely meant that you took the dogs for a run a little later, or that you wrote to the "Stores" when it was nearer to lunch-time than usual. Every one wrote to the "Stores." Every one talked about dogs: there seemed little else to talk about. There were writing-tables, three or four of them in every room, and in the hall and anteroom. People seemed to write notes unendingly, but Christina fancied that they were always to the "Stores." If any one seemed in a hurry—which was not often—it was when they returned from some unneces-

sary walk, and hastily flung off their gloves to "write to the *Staws*." If you went for a walk in the morning, it meant having to change muddy boots and muddy skirts at one o'clock. And when this dry and comfortable state of things had been attained, it generally seemed to be understood that you were expected to go out and get wet and muddy again until tea-time. Between tea and dinner there was a London evening paper to read, and the gentlemen disappeared to the smoking-room; after dinner they played billiards, while Anne and Christina worked. They all seemed quite happy. It gave Anne untold pleasure to get so many comforters or flannel petticoats for the poor finished by Christmas-time, while neither she nor Mr. Drummond ever cared to leave their home. Dick "looked after the place," he said. His own den was hung with county maps, and contained a directory, the Stores list, and Burke's "County Families." His library consisted of "Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour," and its brother volumes the Badminton Series, and a railway time-table. Here he interviewed his bailiff, enjoyed his own volubility, and wasted many hours of his servant's time. He rode but little, and yet spent much time in his stables, often carrying his conversation with his coachman far into the afternoon. He had his small economies, which were a constant interest to him; and Anne did a little mild housekeeping, and worked for the parish. And then they were English, and little things seemed to please English people. But the daughter of a busy, middle-class Scottish merchant, who had mended her father's socks, and had done the daily marketing with a bag upon her arm, felt as though she were living in some exhausted atmosphere, and wanted some one

to open the window! Why were all novels so misleading? Why had they talked of life in a fine old English country-house as if it were the summit of human enjoyment? Did *no one* know that it consisted mostly in taking the dogs for a run, and writing to the "Stores"? Of course no novel would sell if the truth were known, and perhaps that was the reason why they all lied so freely. Novels were very like Mrs. Weeks: they depicted things with a false light upon them, and the gray reality was made a little ridiculous in the artificial glare. Christina thought that it must be persons exactly like Mrs. Weeks who wrote novels.

"It is going to be *such* a good performance to-night," she heard her saying to Mr. Drummond, when at last he rose to say "Good-bye."

"Have been trying to catch your eye for the last half-hour," he whispered to Christina. "I did not know whether you ought to make the move or I; but perhaps we had better be going, as we are coming back for the Penny Reading to-night. It is very lucky that we called at the Vicarage this afternoon," he continued, as they walked down the little drive, "otherwise we might not have heard of this 'gaff' at all. It would have been very nice," he said later, "if they had asked us in afterwards to supper; but, perhaps, Mrs. Weeks did not think of it. I wonder if I could get Anne to suggest that we should go in for a bit. Anne is rather diffident about such things, but it would be amusing for you, and it is a pleasant house to go to."

The brougham was ordered for eight o'clock, and dinner was put forward, giving Mr. Drummond time to write "only a few notes," which he dropped into the

letter-box in the hall, demanding them afterwards from the butler, as was his usual custom, because, as he was wont to observe to that functionary, "I believe her ladyship wrote to such and such a one," or, confidentially, "I do not believe I need write that letter after all; just give it back, Bragg."

John Churchill would not go to the village entertainment. "Which means a dead loss of sixpence," Dickie said, "unless we take Joan. Why should not she go? Do you mind, Anne?" So Joan made a fourth in the brougham.

Christina had hardly got accustomed to a brougham yet, and always enjoyed going out in it at night. The light shed by the lamps on the black, bare hedges, the quick trotting of the well-matched horses, the clean interior luxuriousness of the carriage, and the footman standing at the door with the fur rug on his arm, gave her a feeling of satisfaction and solid comfort. The big landau belonging to the Irbys of Stonecroft drew up before them at the Parish Hall, and Christina thought that she would tell Colin that all the county was there, but remembered Mrs. Weeks, and decided merely to say that she and the Drummonds had driven over in a carriage and pair! The little crowd round the doorway delighted her, and she felt that she was "in Society." She followed Lady Anne to a front seat, while Mrs. Weeks waved delighted welcomes to them from between the curtains of the stage. Mrs. Weeks, it need hardly be said, was going to perform at the entertainment. The vicar received them in his depressed way, and pointed them to the front row of chairs, on which "Reserved" had been written in conspicuous black and

white. The Irbys smiled and nodded at Christina, and began to converse in a friendly way with her, but Christina was grand and distant. She aired a little of her knowledge of what was done in the best families, spoke with an exalted English accent, and felt that in future she would drop Colin M'Crae altogether.

The entertainment opened with the usual pianoforte solo, which stands on every programme, to drown, if possible, the noise that the entry of late comers creates. Fortunately the performance was not worthy of any higher office than this, and Miss Groves was not accustomed to an attentive audience, so the arrangement was suitable from every point of view. Christina was hardly aware that the Penny Reading had actually begun, and whispered to Miss Irby, looking at the pianist, "I suppose she is just playing herself?" Miss Irby did not understand the Scotch idiom, smiled foolishly, and said, "I suppose so." And the Scotchwoman wondered how many more stupid people she was going to meet! The grocer's assistant sang, raising himself in a professional manner upon his toes whenever he attempted to take a high note; and the chemist sang a duet with the lawyer's niece, who showed her knowledge of the difference in their respective ranks by standing at the extreme end of the platform from the son of pharmacy. A beginner played upon the violin; and a reciter tolled curfew bells, and besought some one to "shoot this old gray head."

The hall became very hot and stuffy, and there were little rivulets of condensed atmosphere running down all the windows. The boys at the back of the hall were very noisy, and the girls in the twopenny seats were

very quiet. The gases flared overhead, and the Bible pictures which adorned the walls of the Parish Hall (used for Sunday-school purposes on Sunday) were decorated with wreaths of holly in anticipation of Christmas-time.

Mrs. Weeks was determined to make the thing go off well. She could several times be heard applauding from behind the curtain, and she now appeared in evening dress, but wearing gauntlet gloves, a bowler hat, and carrying a whip in her hand. The song she had chosen to sing was one called "The Tin Gee-gee," and it was evident that its equestrian character was subtly suggested by Mrs. Weeks's costume, which she had donned to assist the sporting nature of the song. The whip was cracked twice before Mrs. Weeks began to sing, and while the accompaniment was being played, she settled her hat more firmly upon the side of her head, looked handsome and matronly, and winked in a vulgar way towards the back of the hall. Between the verses, it became evident that Mrs. Weeks had still better things in store for a realistic representation of the part she was playing. It was not too clear whether she was the "tin gee-gee" itself, or the rider of it; for she not only chirruped to an imaginary steed, as a cabman does to his horse, but she encouraged herself with short flicks of her whip, and pointed poutingly at a "little dolly girl," whose price in toyland exceeded her own. The winking continued—whether the wink of a horse or of its rider was not made evident; but towards the end of the song Mrs. Weeks must have decided to adopt the *role* of the lower animal. She made a few galloping steps across the uncertain stage,

which shook beneath her, continued the prancing motion while the final chords were being played, and lastly, made her bow with her whip held across her knees, and her kind, pleasant face beaming under the little hat. The enthusiastic portion of the audience near the door stamped and shouted their applause, and Mrs. Weeks hastily seized her second song, which she always held in reserve, and placed it before the accompanist, lest the plaudits should cease before she could give her encore.

She descended from the platform when the second song was ended, and shook hands effusively with every one. "It did go off well! Oh, not at all; it's too kind of you. Yes, I think one ought to give people something cheery. After all, they come here to be amused." She scattered her smiles and her thanks amongst the "county people," as she would have called them, and then sat down beside Anne Drummond, saying, "I want you all to come back to supper. Do come; it will be *such* fun. Oh, you must not think of going home yet; we have all quite determined to make a night of it. Excuse me one minute; I must prompt Willie to say a few words of thanks to you all. And now I must whip in my pack"—the tin gee-gee had completely demoralized Mrs. Weeks—"and we will all go across to the Vicarage." She led the way through the dripping graveyard, conversing all the time. "*Did* you notice those girls in the front row? I was so tickled by them. Oh, I *must* tell you what old Mrs. Smith said to me as we came out. 'Lor, mum,' she said, 'it were just beautiful—seemed almost like a *theeaytre*!' Wasn't it killing? I do think the remarks these people make are so droll."

There were meat sandwiches for supper, and cups of bovril, which Mrs. Weeks called clear soup. At this description her children looked grave, and commented upon it with their usual admonitory "O babbah!" Mrs. Weeks was "making things go off well;" she distributed her viands with that air of good-natured philanthropy which is unconsciously acquired by those who are more accustomed to dispensing food than merely helping it. And she ushered her friends across the tiny hall of the Vicarage with a parochial "This way, please." It puzzled Christina to understand why, now that the hour waxed late, and the entertainment of the evening seemed to be over, a series of little games, suggesting the ponderous jollity of a choir supper, should take place. She submitted, nevertheless, in her grave fashion, to having her wrists tied together with a piece of string, and linked with the string on the wrists of stout Mr. Irby; and she and he twisted their arms over each other's heads, stepped backwards and forwards across the cord, and did all that was expected of them.

Mr. Drummond, meanwhile, was delightedly holding "his left arm in his right hand, and his right foot in his left hand"—according to Mrs. Weeks's directions—and in this attitude he endeavoured to lift a cork out of a bottle with his teeth. Lady Anne chatted pleasantly to the vicar, who seemed to warm under her kindly manner, while she held a curious collection of forfeits upon her knee to be redeemed afterwards by the antics of those who had put them in pledge.

Christina having now hopelessly entangled herself in Mr. Irby's string, and stepped several times into

his extended arms, received such a cruel blow upon her foot by Mr. Irby's attempting the same gymnastics with her that she gravely untied the string at her wrist and joined a group of the stolid, supercilious Weeks children who stood by the door. "Don't you play these games at all, yourselves?" she asked conversationally of a small boy about nine years old. "No," said the little fellow; "it overheats us, you know, and then we get cold; besides, we hate them!" A sallow-faced little girl with grave brown eyes, and a hoarse voice, directed Christina's attention to Mr. Drummond's antics. "A merry little animal that," she said in a sepulchral tone, "but quite mad!" Christina was seized with a sudden fit of laughter, and when Christina laughed no one could resist the infection of it. It was a real laugh, not a giggle; and the clear notes that rippled out, one after another, were like a child's delightful merriment, and every one turned round to look at her. No one had known till then that Christina *could* laugh, and they pressed upon her to know what the joke might be, till the girl grew grave again, and begged them "not to heed."

Dick, who had tumbled over his empty bottle many times without succeeding in raising the cork, was a little cross, and told Anne gravely when they reached home that he did not quite like that sudden burst of laughter. "It was a little odd," he thought, "and proved that Christina was not quite——" with an explanatory tap upon his forehead. "But she's astonishingly pretty," he added, "and I wish Southwark was coming to the party."

CHAPTER V.

It seemed an established fact at Poplar's Court that every one should arrive by the 4.45 train. This landed the guests at the Court shortly after five o'clock. Christina's dreamy-looking gray eyes, which saw everything with such surprising wakefulness, had watched the brougham, the station omnibus, and the luggage-cart depart in the afternoon; and now, as she and Lady Anne sat by the tea-table in the lamp-lit hall, Christina was mentally undergoing a thorough education, and was learning every detail of her lesson with absorbing intentness.

Mr. Drummond bustled out to the porch to receive his guests himself. "Was that the correct thing or merely Dickie's eccentricity? Would it not have been more impressive for a butler and two footmen to have gone to the door?" The scene that began to enact itself gave Christina the sensation of looking at the moving pictures in a cinematograph.

Miss Anstruther came in first—sealskin jacket, dark velvet toque, and dark skirt—perfectly at home, chatted directly, and not in the least shy. She walked with short, clicking steps over the polished floor of the hall, gave Anne first one cheek and then another to kiss. "Dear Anne, not a bit cold; plenty of foot-warmers!" And then Christina found herself introduced to this unabashed lady, and her hand was grasped somewhere

high up in the air, shaken slightly from side to side, and let fall suddenly. Feeling a little bewildered by this unusual form of salutation, Christina recovered herself to find that two gentlemen were making low bows to her from the other side of the hearth; she had not caught either of their names, but nodded her head primly in response. She became part of the moving picture.

Then Dickie entered in a jocose manner, his arm linked through that of a tall, handsome girl in a big hat, while he performed polka steps by her side, and addressed her in tones of rapture as "My own lovey-dovey!" "Old friends," murmured Lady Anne, in an explanatory manner, and advanced to meet the newcomer with a few pleasant words of greeting. Judith Campbell was every one's good sort. She had never been known to say anything unkind of any one or to any one. She had great tales to tell over the hair-brushing o' nights of the flirtations of men. But it was more than evident that Judith had never been seriously affected by the attentions she had received. She got letters daily from "Tommies" and "Johnnies" all over the world, and her room was a gallery of soldiers in uniform and keepsakes from departed heroes. Every man that she mentioned was "a great friend" of hers. Each one had proposed to her at some time or other; but as Judith had made up her mind that she would never love any one who had money, and it being absolutely impossible for her to marry any one who had it not, her love affairs generally ended with an exchange of keepsakes or photographs, and in extreme cases locks of hair. And Judith's Sunday afternoons were

spent either in flirting with some fresh, unsuitable and penniless man, or in writing to unhealthy Indian stations to some one whom she had "liked awfully, but who had not a penny, poor chap!" She was excessively handsome, had a brilliant colour that every one said was rouge, and submitted to be called fast by people who did not in the least understand her.

Miss Anstruther, the girl with the clicking heels and the sealskin jacket, had all the assurance of a married woman. She was a wise girl, had never been talked about, had made up her mind to marry well, had faultless manners and a keen eye to matrimony. Her mother was one of *the* Gordons, and her father was "Anstruther of Anstruther"—a name to give lightly and matter-of-factly in a letter to Colin—and there was never anything that was worth seeing or a party worth going to for which Miss Anstruther did not get an invitation. Her powers of amusing others were not such as to warrant the frequent demands made for her society, but every one seemed to know that Lilah Anstruther was always to be relied upon to arrive punctually, to dress faultlessly, and to say and do the right thing upon every given occasion. She was not pretty, but her figure was charming, and her hair always exquisitely dressed. Christina thought Miss Anstruther was almost aggressively ladylike, and she wondered if she could ever have said or done anything vulgar; her accent was refined to a degree that Christina thought bordered upon affectation. And beneath all this there was a frank intelligence and determination which perhaps explained the enigmatical remark made by her friends, when Miss Anstruther subsequently married a baronet with ten thousand a

year, that "they always knew that Lilah Anstruther meant to succeed!"

She sat down beside Christina, and remarked, holding up her muff to the fire as a screen, and extending one slender, well-booted foot towards the warmth of the logs, "I suppose you are stopping here?" To which Christina replied "Yes!" and added, "Lady Anne Drummond is a cousin of an intimate friend of mine."

Christina wore her best black silk dress, and sat in the attitude that had been taught her at the dancing academy; and Lilah, who was an astute young person, took a long look at her, and decided that in spite of her beauty she would never be a social success. The studied accent and the prim replies betokened an amazing ignorance of the world; and though, of course, it went without saying that a girl with good looks and £18,000 a year could marry whom she pleased, Lilah, like every one else, decided that Christina was very stupid. It was rather hopeless attempting to make conversation with any one who seemed to belong so entirely to some other world, and having essayed a few of the subjects most commonly under discussion in society at the time, Miss Anstruther was compelled to fall back upon the barren, interrogatory style of conversation, and put Christina through a kindly catechism of her tastes and her pursuits, receiving in reply the truth without embellishment of unnecessary words. She was glad to move presently to another seat in the hall, excusing herself from Christina's side by saying that she felt too hot so near the fire.

Lady Anne then introduced "dear Alice," and a tall

lady, with fair hair and a perennial smile, came and sat down by Christina as though she were doing some good work, the righteousness of which gave pleasure to herself. It was surprising to find—only so many things were surprising—that “dear Alice’s” conversation consisted almost entirely of self-praise. She had been working in the East End lately, and she was sure Christina would not misunderstand her when she said that “everybody had loved her.” Christina murmured that she was sure that that was very nice. And Alice continued, “I assure you the poor men at the Club used to wait for me to come in the evening with a pleasure they could hardly conceal. I always made them put out their pipes whenever I came in. I said, ‘That is a civility which you owe to an English lady.’ And the same way with the women. ‘Rise up when I enter,’ was my invariable rule; ‘it is good for you, and it is good for me.’ And so we learnt to understand each other. I never gave them money, for I do not think it is right; but the gratitude I received knew no bounds. Are you interested in parish work?”

“No,” said Christina: “Scotch people do not like you going to their houses unless you just want the pleasure of seeing them.”

“Have you no district visitors then?” said Alice, and she fumbled in her pocket for a little notebook to take down what Christina would say. The subject was an interesting one to her, and she thought she would write to some Church paper upon the question.

Christina was disappointing, as usual. “I could not say,” she replied. “I would not admit a district visitor myself, and that is all I know.”

“ Ah! ” Dear Alice put her notebook back in her pocket again. She had looked forward to meeting Anne Drummond’s Scotch friend, but certainly she was not intelligent. Alice hoped she was *good*. Alice herself was, to use a fine word lightly, very good. Goodness, if one may say so with all respect, was her long suit, and it answered very well. Most people called her “ the best of women,” and she gathered up a good many loaves and fishes by her strict adherence to the Christian pilgrimage. A certain ultra-safe conventionality, which is many people’s idea of piety, hedged Alice on every side. She mistook vanity for aspiration, and thanked God she was not as other girls are. Anne thoroughly believed in Alice. She was supposed to have an excellent influence over young girls, and was fond of reading “ The Christian Year ” aloud in her bedroom on Sunday afternoons. Her lighter accomplishment was that of “ yodeling.” It was considered by her friends that no one could equal Alice in imitating the well-known cries of the Swiss mountaineers. She was generally asked for a demonstration of her talent before she had been very long in a country house ; but if no one made this request, Alice would yodel in her bedroom with the door open, and “ hope that she disturbed nobody.” She was tall and thin, with rather a pretty figure, parted her hair in the middle, and wore gray silk in the evening, with a white fichu and a few natural flowers.

There began to be some romping and shouts of laughter over by the tea-table where Judith was sitting—a sudden disputation as to who should have the last piece of muffin, and a noisy onslaught amongst the cups and

saucers with a jingling of teaspoons, and cries of "Hold him down, Bunkins! Stick to it, Dickie! Catch, Miss Campbell!" Alice rose and said, "I will go and dress now; I always leave the room directly there is any ragging." She linked her arm in Anne's, drawing her upstairs for one of those intimate bedroom chats in which the soul of Alice delighted, and Christina was left alone in her oak chair on the other side of the hearth.

There was something a little wistful about her isolation—not that caused by the few feet of space which separated her from the tea-table and its noisy group, but in her utter want of relationship to the big family who all know each other, and whom one calls Society.

Either you belonged to this big family or you did not belong to it. There seemed to be no betwixt or between. You would have to grow up amongst them, Christina thought, even to understand their mode of talking, their amusements, their interests, or even their jokes. Her courage failed her when she thought of drawing nearer the laughing group; and she steadied hands that trembled a little against the arms of her chair, and looked into the fire.

And then Barnabas came to her, because he was "the Son of Consolation," and had earned his sobriquet on account of his being a courteous, a kindly, a very noble person, of whom it might be said truly that "manners makyth man." But then one must also understand that manners are the outcome of a noble mind, that they are made up of petty sacrifices, a tender consideration for the feelings and needs of others, and something more—a sort of innate goodness and blamelessness of character, and a genial, kindly spirit such as

shone through Barny's grave blue eyes. Barnabas is Lord Hardcastle, and his baptismal name is Michael. No one ever dreams of calling him anything but Barnabas. His features are quite subservient to the expression of his face, and most people, if asked to describe him, would probably say, "I do not quite know what he is like. No, not handsome, of course, but then, why should you want a man to be handsome?" He has long arms and legs, rather a colourless, healthy face, a big nose, and eyes that have never seen the worst side of any one yet.

Barnabas sat down beside Christina, and he was the only person who did not begin his conversation by remarking that it was cold. He pushed the log fire together with his foot, and turning, said to the girl with an air of confidence and friendliness, "I am allowed to do that, you know, Miss M'Nab, because I have known Dick more than seven years."

Christina forgot to hold on to the arms of her chair, forgot even her English accent for a little while, and said, in low Scotch tones, turning her beautiful face to Barny's, "I think every one knows Dick very well."

Lord Hardcastle laughed, and said, "Ah, *you* see how it is! We all feel as if we had known Dick seven years, even if we have only met him yesterday. But ours is really an old friendship, and I am godfather to Joan."

"How is John Churchill, do you know?" he asked her presently. And Christina felt for the first time that she was one of the family. "Is he any better? is he brighter than he used to be? Does he come downstairs at all when you are alone?"

Christina replied, "Oh yes ; he is always down when there isn't company here. He seems a very disagreeable man."

Barny glanced quickly at her, but not unkindly. "Ah, I must tell you about John some day," he said ; "you must suspend your judgment until then."

Christina was silent for full five minutes after this, and Lord Hardcastle continued talking without receiving any of her attention. She was looking at him all the time with unseeing eyes, and when he had asked her some question about a favourite dog which Dick was keeping for him, Christina said, still in her pleasant Scotch voice, "I am sorry I said that about Mr. Churchill ; you make one feel sort of ashamed."

"No, no," he said, "not a bit ; do not think that. John is a difficult man to know, but I thought the Drummonds might have told you. Some day you must take me for a long walk—will you ?—and we shall talk about all the neighbours and their affairs, and I will tell you about John. Now, I suppose you want to go and dress," looking at his watch ; "how long do you take ?"

"I should like to take you for a walk some day," replied Christina, going back in a certain categorical way she had to any question that had been previously asked her. "I'm afraid you will find it very dull, but I hope you won't forget."

"I shan't forget," said Barnabas, smiling and giving her her candle. "You have only half an hour till dinner-time, Miss M'Nab. Does your maid get very cross when you make her hurry ?"

"Jessie is just an old servant we used to have at

home," said Christina; "I would hardly call her a maid."

"Tell Jessie it was all my fault," laughed Barnabas, watching her going up the staircase.

Christina put on her black evening dress, high to the neck, and with a severe black collar-band, from which her white throat rose in soft, gracious lines; her red hair rolled in deep, generous waves from a white parting, and lay in misty ripples upon her forehead, and was plaited in tight, hard braids at the back. Her gray eyes—unfathomable, unawakened—looked straightly at the world, while the keen nose and red lips belied the upper part of the face, giving it a provoking character, because of its contradictions.

It was the hush before dinner-time. The upstairs world at Poplar's Court dressed itself; the bustle of the lower world that prepared dinner was far away. One after another the doors of the guest-chambers in the long corridors gave up their occupants. The ladies sailed out fresh from the skilful hands of their maids, calm in the consciousness of being in an Englishwoman's most becoming dress, neat and trim from rippled hair to satin shoe, taller in the dignity of trains, perfectly at home in full dress and diamonds—miracles of civilization and the refinement of ages: Lady George Seaton in pink satin and old lace; Judith Campbell in bravest scarlet tulle; Alice Maynard in her gray silk; and Lilah Anstruther in a perfectly-fitting brown dress, such as no one else would have thought of devising.

Jessie, who kneeled by her mistress's door, which she had placed conveniently ajar, was the person who

saw all these fair ladies pass by, and she reported upon them to Christina in a hoarse whisper. Jessie was summoned to Miss M'Nab's bedroom in a ceremonious manner every night before dinner; but she was not skilled in making a lady's toilet, or, as she expressed it, was "nae hand at the dressin'," so that she was generally merely a companion during the hour of robing, and sat on a chair by the fire making observations to her mistress. To-night she "cooried" down by the door, making trite remarks on the passers-by. "There goes ane gran' leddy, juist dressed to death and killed wi' the fashion; wha' will tha' be noo? Lassie, did ever ye see the like of this auld body wi' airms for a' the world like bolsters, jingling wi' beads like a bird o' Paradise? Here's diamonds for ye! Ye might get a few glass ones yersel', juist no to be beat. Thor's yon Laird George as they ca' him; but I think he's got a wife a'ready, and Mr. Venables followin' hard after him. I was wishin' ye wad set your cap at him afore I saw him, but there's a hingieness abut thae shouthers which I couldna pit up wi' mysel'."

Mrs. Weeks, who had driven over in an open pony-cart, was dressed in a purple dressing-gown, called "my tea-gown," in which she looked very handsome and matronly. It puzzled the watching Jessie to imagine why the vicar's wife should walk across the polished floor of the corridor holding the train of her dark-coloured dress up in both hands—Jessie not being aware that it was the Rev. William Weeks's invariable practice to tread heavily upon the train of any lady who walked in front of him. "And what will thon be for, noo?" m'urmured Jessie. "Here's the minister's

wife gane by haudin' on to her goon wi' baith hands, as if the lobby was a' glaur."

"I could not say," replied Christina; "you never know what they are after."

The Miss Tollemaches in white gowns had arrived by a late train, and sailed down the corridor followed by Mrs. Blake, the last of the house party, in sparkling jet.

Christina now thought that the time had arrived for joining the party in the drawing-room, and she stood at the door of that room for five full minutes lacking courage to enter, till Bunkins, flying downstairs at a full gallop—late as usual—almost knocked her down. "A maid listening at the door," thought Bunkins, deceived by the simplicity of Christina's attire. Then he saw the wavy red hair and big dreamy eyes, and said kindly, "Let's go in together; it's beastly entering a room last, unless you have got a nailing good gown—which you have, of course," he added hastily. "I like black silk better than anything, myself;" and he blushed, for he was a truthful boy by nature.

Bunkins, whose real name was Anstruther—he being Lilah's brother—took the heiress in to dinner, and he told Anne afterwards that he thought it very decent indeed of her to have given him the first chance. He applauded every single remark which Christina made without reference either to its intelligence or its wit, and remarked heartily, "I quite agree with you," to whatever sentiments the girl shyly uttered. "A nice, simple, unaffected girl" he pronounced her in his own mind to be, with that predisposition to approval which a beautiful heiress inspires in people's minds.

After dinner all the girls spoke to her in a friendly sort of way, and Mrs. Blake, fixing tortoiseshell-rimmed eyes upon her, inquired sternly if she were one of *the* M'Nabs. "I suppose so," replied Christina. And Mrs. Blake set her down as being either an adventuress or a fool.

Judith Campbell came and sat beside her on the sofa, tucked a lot of silk pillows behind her back, remarking as she did so, "I never see why one should not be comfortable; do you?" and began to give Christina biographies—snap shots in words—of each of the guests at Poplar's Court. The habit of snap-shotting seemed to be one of the fashions of Society. Every one had their portrait taken verbally, and the artist who spoke endowed his subject with a "pose" which they were always expected to assume.

Once or twice that afternoon and evening Christina had overheard scraps of conversation which showed that her own personal history was being given in much the same way—"Thirty thousand a year; really, truly! Tubes!" She always heard tubes mentioned, when she herself was under discussion, followed by the invariable question, "What *are* tubes? Were they twopenny tubes, or gas-pipes? Goodness only knew!" And again: "Forty thousand a year, and beautiful—too much luck for one girl—not even big feet—so many heiresses were handicapped by big feet!" *Da capo*. "What *were* tubes?"—"Every one," she soliloquized, "had a label attached to them." Bunkins was "funny," Judith was "a good sort," Barny was "the Son of Consolation," Dickie was "an ass," and Alice was "good." She wondered what would happen

supposing Dickie wanted to be clever for a day or two ; or if Alice should be seized by a desire not to be quite so good as usual ; or if Bunkins were to demand a rest from being funny. Would the label that Society had affixed on them prevent their indulging in the display of characteristics which did not legally belong to them ? Might the labels be detached sometimes ? " Alice Maynard ? Oh, she was good, of course. I should hate to have started that rôle myself," said Judith frankly ; " you get no fun, and only bore the men. Bunkins is a dear. Miss M'Nab was aware, of course, that Bunkins owed his sobriquet to his famous play, *No Wonder Bunkins Smiled*. It was screamingly funny. What fun it would be to try and get up a representation of it at Popples ! She must ask Anne if they might do it some night. Mr. Venables was frantically rich, but really not bad, considering. He gave parties, and mammas all loved him. Captain Stonor, that little man who had rotted so much at teatime, was the smallest man in the navy, and was always called ' Bildad.' Was not that nickname *too good* ? "

Christina did not see the point of the joke, and asked if it was because he was one of Job's comforters ?

" No, no," laughed Judith ; " Bildad the Shoeheight—do you see ? Ah no. Barnabas is the comforter ; you know they call him the ' Son of Consolation.' Did you know him before, Miss M'Nab ? "

Christina replied, " No ; but she was quite sure the real aristocracy were easy to get on with."

Judith's face had softened a little, but she spoke with her usual amazing frankness. " I only once very nearly got into a scrape," she said, " and Barny got

me out of it. I daresay I was an idiot at the time—most girls are idiots at seventeen. I'll tell you about it some day, if you like. I suppose you'll have an awfully good time when you come up to town for the season," she went on. "You will get heaps of attention, and enjoy yourself immensely, I am sure. Be sure you come and see us. We live on twopence a year in a poky little flat; but I always enjoy everything."

"You are very handsome," said Christina simply, raising heavy-lidded eyes to Miss Campbell's radiant face.

Judith laughed. "It is not a bit of good, unless you have money as well," she said; and added without a trace of envy in her voice, "I only wish I had half your dollars."

Christina liked an allusion to her fortune, and counted the fact that she was an heiress when the gulf that separated her from the "aristocracy" seemed to open wide between her and them.

Lady George Seaton sailed across the big drawing-room in her pink satin and roses, and sat down with a friendly air at Christina's other side. "I want you to tell me if you are any relation to a dear friend of mine, Ronnie M'Nab," she said.

"I spell my name with two 'b's,'" said Christina grandly. She wished she had thought of saying this when Mrs. Blake had asked her if she were related to *the* M'Nabs; but at the time she had not really understood that the lady alluded to Sir David M'Nab's family.

"I am afraid Ronnie has only got one 'b,'" said Lady George, smiling.

The heiress's manner was not encouraging, and after

making one or two painful efforts at conversation, Lady George was thankful to see that the gentlemen were returning from the dining-room.

Mrs. Weeks now took full possession of the party, and having obtained a large empty table and some tumblers, began to display some "dying Slopers" which she had brought with her. Every one began to inflate the droll-shaped bladders, and shouted with laughter when the air escaped, and the dejected dolls collapsed over the side of the tumblers. They all declared that the Slopers were "quite good"—an expression which Christina heard constantly on every side, and was doing her best to imitate. The gentlemen began to bet about which Sloper would die first if all were blown up at the same time, and encouraged the expiring dolls with cries of "Bear up, old chap! Give your mind to it, and we will pull you through yet! Don't cry out before you're hurt! Be a man, sir—be a man!" and then passed shillings about from hand to hand, as the bets were lost or won.

Mrs. Weeks's enjoyment in the success of the entertainment she had, unasked, provided, was complete; and Mr. Weeks, to whom the painted bladders were old friends, retired from the table, and began to converse with Christina. He asked her if she had been for certain walks in the neighbourhood, and warned her against damp feet if she should walk in School Lane. The Much-Benham road was awful at present, and he had not been able to bicycle there for three weeks. With such remarks as these, which Mr. Weeks called conversation, he enlivened the evening. He was deep in the minutest diagnosis of his youngest child's latest

cold, when Christina was recalled to the group round the table by Dickie, who said, "You must come here, Miss M'Nab! Colonel Blake is showing us a model of Marconi's wireless telegraphy; it is an awfully good toy."

Exactly the same remarks were passed upon this plaything as upon the "dying Slopers:" every one said "quite good," as they had done before, and Christina, who took serious matters seriously, never guessed that two of the gentlemen present, who were explaining the "ripping little toy," knew more of the subject under discussion than any one else in England at the time.

Two of the party had begun to play solitaire, and Christina at last saw an opening for making a few remarks.

"I knew a man once," she began, heavily conversational, "who died of playing solitaire."

"Paw beast!" said Bunkins sympathetically.

"He was an only son, too," she plodded on.

"Oh, *paw* beast," said Bunkins.

"Yes, he attended our church regularly," said Christina.

"Oh, paw—I mean, did he really? That was awfully nice for him, I am shaw."

"Oh," thought Christina, "if I could only talk their language—only laugh over their little performing pigs, and scream over their dying Slopers, and call Marconi's wireless telegraphy 'quite a good toy,' how happy I should be!" It was all the same: whether it was Joan's race game, her mechanical pig, the Marconi telegraph, or Mrs. Weeks's Slopers, the vocabulary of society was the same. And whether they spoke of Bunkins, who wrote "ripping plays," or Colonel Blake, who

made "ripping inventions," or Canon Phillips, who preached "quite good sermons," or Mrs. Blake, who told "quite good scandals," the conversation was carried on with the same brilliant imbecility.

Christina slipped away early. It was no one's fault. She was out of it. She had had her chance, and had missed it; no one could put up for very long with such dullness, such primness, such stupidity. If it were shyness, "she had," as Mrs. Blake remarked, "no business to be shy." Christina undid her tightly-plaited coils of copper-coloured hair, and let it fall in a shower about her, dried a few tears, and consoled herself by writing a brilliant account of the evening to Colin.

And every other woman at Popples, collectively and individually, said to Lady Anne Drummond before they slept that night, "My dear, why *don't* you dress her?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE next morning Christina crept down to breakfast early, and sat mute in her place taking notes. The party at Popples, whom she called comprehensively the aristocracy, were the subject of her musings. "They are never ill, and they are always clean. None of them are shy, and none of them talk about their possessions, except it be their dogs. These are the only property that any one of them boasts of. Their dogs are always better than any one else's dogs. Their children, when others praise them, are dismissed with a courteous, half-deprecating smile, and—'Oh, she's a funny little thing; don't let her tease you! It's too good of you to bother about her.' Their boys are always alluded to as 'my small boy.' They never push, nor take other people's places anywhere or by any chance; and they never take a liberty."

English society, she thought, is a walled garden, and you are either outside or inside, as she was beginning to discover. Even to an heiress the gates of the garden seemed to be closed. Christina had received some good advice from Colin that morning, and the letter was still in her pocket. "Mix with them all you can," were Colin's words. "But 'deed," said the girl despondently, "I do not believe mixing will do it. You have got to be born one of them."

Each girl, as she came down to breakfast, was a

source of wonder to Christina. Had they practised behind the door that particular way of entering a room—the playful nod, the word of courteous greeting to their hostess, their easy submission to the attentions of gentlemen who supplied their wants, and their simple acceptance of the courtesies of the table? Poor Christina wanted some cold game badly, and glanced at the side-board once or twice; but this particular dish was not suggested to her by the gentleman who sat beside her, and Christina had not the courage to ask for any. In Murchison Street you accepted what was offered to you, and what was not offered was not intended should be eaten. “Good-mawning, Lawd Gawge,” she repeated inwardly to herself, in faithful imitation of Lilah Anstruther, who had just greeted George Seaton. It would be a grand thing to be able to pronounce a title with such an air of assurance, and she timidly began to practise the art upon Lord Hardcastle, who took a chair next her.

“Good-mawning, Lord Barnabas,” she said—only to the “Son of Consolation” could she have ventured the greeting—“I suppose you will be shooting to-day?”

“Oh, good-morning,” said Barny. “You slipped away early last night, did you not? I looked for you to say good-night, but you had flown.”

Christina had gone to her room, in a flattened-out condition, at an early hour; but now her social defeats did not seem so disastrous. She put on a little air of assurance, and slightly patronized Lord Hardcastle upon one or two points.

“I am afraid we cannot have our walk to-day,” he

said presently, "but I suppose some of the ladies will be coming out in the afternoon with the guns."

"Is it dangerous work?" asked the town-bred girl.

"Not a bit; you come with me, will you, and let me look after you? And I promise faithfully I shall not shoot you."

Later on it was decided that the ladies should take out luncheon to the sportsmen, and a big wagonette and a pony-cart came round to the door at one o'clock. Mrs. Blake was going to take her husband's place, and "do a bit of shootin'" in the afternoon; and she was dressed in a man's coat and gaiters, a short skirt, and a tweed cap. Miss Anstruther looked neat and charming in a short, well-cut, tailor-made gown, and a plain felt hat with a black cock's wing in it. Even Alice Maynard wore a bowdlerized edition of a tailor-made gown. Only Christina was in black cashmere and black silk. Lady George stayed at home with John Churchill, who had appeared at breakfast that morning, and seemed to be better. These two were fast friends of many years' standing. Indeed Cicely seemed to be a woman universally beloved. It was rather difficult to know why this should be so, for fair sweet Cicely was neither beautiful nor clever; but there was about her something of the gentleness and fragrance of a flower—a woman who remained as a charming memory to those who had even met her but once, and to those who knew her well an inspiration.

Alice offered to drive the pony-cart, in a self-sacrificing tone; which astonished Christina, as she could see that one or two of the girls would have liked to drive. She invited Christina to the other place in the pony-cart,

and took the girl under her wing with that air of overdone charity which made her attentions somewhat irritating. They were some time behind the wagonette in starting, owing to a difficulty about rugs in the first instance—one rug in particular, named by Alice “my dear old plaidie from bonnie Scotland” being the only one that it seemed would suit her that morning; and in the second place “Birdie,” a little dog with muddy feet, had to be found and placed by Alice’s directions on Christina’s knee. Thus equipped they started for the wintry luncheon-party. Alice beguiled the tedium of the drive by a good deal of sweet counsel, paraphrasing many of her remarks with the words, “Girls like you and me cannot be too careful.” Christina glanced wonderingly at her companion, whose age—even from a charitable point of view—could not have numbered less than thirty-seven summers; but she said nothing, her attention indeed being principally engaged in repairing the ravages which “Birdie” was making upon her gown.

Alice drove the pony by tugging at its mouth and smiling at it. She asked Christina her opinion of every one who was staying in the house, appending the remark to some of those under discussion, “I hate to be ill-natured, but I really don’t think I should advise you to have much to do with him, or with her. Poor Judith! she is getting a little hard, I think, and wants the softening influence of love. If she could gain the affection of some good man, it would be the making of her. Poor Judith! there is really a great deal of good in the girl; it was only a pity that she is so silly about men.”

Miss Maynard hinted at a bygone love affair of her

own, to which her heart was still true, and smiling bravely, said, "And so I hold this world very lightly, you see, dear Miss M'Nab, and think only of how to do good and make others happy." She asked Christina for a subscription to a charity, and the girl promised five shillings. Alice looked a little disappointed, and said, "A dear friend of mine in the navy sent me five pounds for this deserving object ; but what will not a man do for a good woman ? "

"I could not say, I am sure," said Christina.

Arrived at some wet-looking haystacks in a field, they found a large party assembled for luncheon. The two Misses Lumley—girls in the schoolroom—wearing "Tam-o'-Shanters," and under the guidance of an elderly governess, had been discovered by Dickie taking their morning walk along the road, and had been pressed into joining the feast by him. A young man, whose name no one could catch, had also been invited by the same hospitable host. Carriage cushions and rugs were placed upon the ground, and the luncheon-party proceeded to eat Irish stew served from a copper pot, and cold viands and jam tarts. They ate the simple fare with the keen enjoyment of schoolboys in a tuck shop, and praised or blamed the viands as they passed them from hand to hand. It was very cold and raw and damp, but Christina found that by sitting on a shiny carriage cushion, and digging her heels into a railway rug upon which Mr. Venables and Bunkins were sitting, she did not actually get wet. The men looked healthy, red, and happy. Their boots and gaiters were heavy with clay ; one or two of them wrapped ungainly tweed capes about them as they sat at lunch, but the greater

number donned no extra covering, and seemed oblivious of the damp, penetrating cold.

Barny, having waited upon everybody as was his custom, appeared to be enjoying a lunch of bread-and-cheese as he sat on a wet stone wall. The ladies from Poplar's Court made gay little remarks suitable to the occasion. To the sensitive ear it might almost seem that they were a series of remarks made at previous shooting luncheons, and aired regularly on these occasions.

The Misses Lumley's freshness and intense enjoyment of their stolen holiday was charming, and they began to tease their governess with schoolgirl glee; and soon every one was engaged in a lively discussion round their particular railway rug. A copy of the *Sporting Times* had been found wrapping up something in one of the luncheon baskets, and Miss Johnson had nervously asked that it might be handed to her. Every one laughed, and Agatha Lumley said, "I do not see why there should not be a lady's *Pink 'Un*, as I am never allowed to read that one."

A meeting was called by the simple expedient of gathering the little party together more closely upon the rug, and excluding Miss Johnson, to whom it was suggested that she should take to a safe distance the hamper upon which she was sitting. Giggling suggestions were made to Agatha, who had nominated herself editor; and Judith Campbell began busily writing notes in one of the gentlemen's pocket-books. The carriage cushions were pushed up closer to the editorial group, and Lilah, who was sitting upon a little seat formed by the handle of her walking-stick, said to her

brother, "Do let us hear what they are talking about, Bunkins."

"That it be called the *Ladies' Pink 'Un*," said the future editor, giving out the minutes of the meeting, "and that no man be allowed to read it."

"Except me," said the young man whose name no one could catch.

"And me! And me! And me!" from a chorus of voices.

"I have three jokes and one excellent story already prepared for the paper," said the younger Miss Lumley, aged fifteen; "one is——"

"My dear, not now," said the governess, giving Angela a warning poke on her Tam-o'-Shanter with her umbrella. Miss Johnson was still hovering, in an apprehensive mood, in close proximity to her pupils, and her solicitude generally took the form of an attack upon one of the woollen Tam-o'-Shanters, which was her method of keeping order.

"One is——" repeated Angela, and she looked sternly about her.

"Have some beef," said Dickie; "it is quite uneatable."

"Or some sandwiches," said Bunkins; "they're beastly."

"Please go on," said Mr. Venables imploringly to the editor. He lay on a macintosh rug behind the hamper, clad in much Harris tweed.

"That it be conducted strictly on the lines of the old *Pink 'Un*," went on the fair editor, continuing to report the minutes of the meeting. "I have a *Pink 'Un* here," she said, "but there's a story in it which I do not understand. It is this——"

"I insist upon it that you do not read the story aloud," said the governess, attacking Agatha's Tam-o'-Shanter in a feverish manner; "you must hand the paper to some gentleman to read the story first, if you want to have anything explained."

Frenzied snatching at the *Pink 'Un* on the part of the whole company.

"I am thinking of a joke for your paper," said Bunkins; "it is to the effect that it will blush a deeper pink than ever when you girls edit it. But," he added, "it ought to be put more fancifully than that. I must think it over."

"Put it into rhyme," said the editor, "and make something neat of it. What rhymes with 'Pink 'Un'?"

"'Drink 'Un,'" said Dickie; "talking of which reminds me——"

A good Samaritan handed him what he wanted.

"I wish I knew what I was drinking," said Lord Hardcastle, looking thoughtfully into his own tumbler. "It has a flavour of beer and whisky and Worcester sauce."

"That's the best of horn tumblers," said Dick; "you can never tell what you are drinking, nor," he added with a sigh, "how much!"

"Talking of ghosts," said the nameless young man, "I once had a very strange experience——"

"We might have a ghost's column," exclaimed the future editor delightedly; "only ghosts are always so horribly respectable."

"Not always," said the governess. "I know of a case——" And then she felt sorry, very sorry, that she had spoken; for every notebook was produced, and

it was even suspected that a well-trained footman of unimpeachable manner had drawn a shade closer. "That is really all," concluded the governess, when she had told the story with the point left out.

"I think it will do for our paper," said the future editor, smiling, "when we have filled in your charming notes."

"It reminds me," said Dickie, "of a story very like it, only in this case the ghost——"

"Pray, pray be careful!" said the governess, with a hastiness which belied the truth of her remark that she had indeed told the story *in extenso*. She blushed, and her eye wandered to Angela's Tam-o'-Shanter.

"I shall interview you privately," said the editor, moving to the other side of the haystack with Dickie, whither the whole company followed her.

Heads were placed close together, and Judith was kept busy wetting the point of her pencil and hastily scribbling notes. "I think it will do," she said, fastening the strap of her notebook, and requesting that a new point might be put to her pencil.

"And the colour of the *Ladies' Pink 'Un*," said Bunkins, "is to be a deep rose."

Anne came forward with the suggestion that the days were very short, and if there was to be any more shooting, would it not be as well to begin?

And Bunkins gave himself credit for the very prompt way in which he went up to Christina, who still sat upon her carriage cushion, and said, "You're coming with me, aren't you?"

Christina looked round for Lord Hardcastle, who was helping to fold up rugs, and decided that he must

have forgotten that they were to walk together ; and Bunkins assisted her to rise from her lowly carriage cushion, or, as he said, gave her a hand up, and walked off with her triumphantly. They took up their position in a wet ride in the wood. The trees dripped overhead, and the whole chilly air breathed moisture. The ground was sodden underfoot, and every hoofmark and footmark and track of wheels in the ride was filled with water. Christina walked along balancing herself on the upper edge of a wheel-rut, and Bunkins remarked cheerfully,—

“ Rather wet, isn't it ? What a plucky girl you are ! Will you take my hand over this bad bit ? ”

“ Thanks ; I'll do fine,” said Christina, drawing down her upper lip.

Arrived at his place in the shoot, Mr. Anstruther stationed Christina at his back and told her not to speak or move.

“ Strange,” murmured Christina to herself, doing as she was bid. “ It was a queer-like way,” she thought, “ of enjoying an afternoon, to stand at a man's back, with your feet coldly sinking in wet clay, and drops falling icily from branches overhead in the silence of the wood.”

Bunkins jerked his arm at her presently, and said, “ Keep back, please.”

“ I haven't moved,” said Christina snappishly. And she added to herself, “ I suppose I've sunk so deep in mud now that I couldn't move if I tried.”

“ Enjoying yourself ? ” inquired Bunkins presently, in a hoarse but hearty whisper.

“ It's just grand,” replied Christina ; “ what more could a person want ? ”

The bitter sarcasm of the remark was lost upon Mr. Anstruther's Harris tweed shoulders, and his opinion of Christina rose every moment.

"If I propose to the girl," he said to himself, "as Lilah seems to think I ought to do, it will be because I really like her."

Farther down the ride could be seen Mrs. Blake and her husband in their strange garments—their attitude of hushed expectancy and furtive keenness reminding Christina of a picture she had once seen of poachers waiting at the edge of a spinney. Not a whisper could be heard from so keen sportsmen, not a twig stirred in the damp green ride, and only one distant laugh from Judith Campbell broke the stillness of the wood. The sun, which had hid its face all day, now showed red in the heavens, and turned the water lying in pools on the grass into blood-red patches. The misty woods were a deep purple colour, and the cold increased in the waning of the afternoon. The cries of the beaters began to sound distantly in the farther end of the wood, and were responded to by a quick instinctive movement on the part of the guns, which reminded one of a terrier pricking up its ears. "Hi-hi! I-yi! Yi-yi! I-yi!" they came nearer with their quaint cries. "Hi-hi! Hi-hi!" coming through the wood with arm uplifted to the face, as a protection against the springing undergrowth, and beating the bushes with sticks. Then with a whirl and a rush the pheasants came overhead, and bounding rabbits tumbled head over heels, and lay dead under the trees. Bang, bang, bang! a pheasant sails forward a yard or two, and then falls like a plumb of lead into the wood. The hares and rabbits go popping

over the ride, and fall at the edge of the wood, and the clocking and noisy flight of the pheasants is over.

The red sun is low in the sky now, and a moon like the rim of a white soup-plate is clear cut on the soft blue overhead. The keepers pick up the game, and one of them knocks a hare, that is still squealing, on its head. Bunkins beats his arms together, and says, "I wish I had not missed that bird with my last barrel." And Mrs. Blake, with her gun over her shoulder, comes down the ride swinging a gory rabbit by the legs, and says, "Just give this to one of the men, Bunkins."

"I am going home," said Christina, loosening great turfs from her boots with the point of a stick: she had, to her own great surprise, escaped death herself in the recent affray. When the first bird fell she had thumped Mr. Anstruther sharply on the back, and begged him "to give over." But he had not seemed to feel the blow nor to hear her. Since that moment she had remained with eyes tightly shut and hands locked together. Now she was hastening back through the wood, pursued by kindly questions as to her being tired or cold; but Christina was in the heart of an ash plantation, leaning against the wet green boughs, and sobbing out, "I hate to see the puir beasts killed; and 'deed I'm not sure but what I was near killed myself!"

CHAPTER VII.

FIVE days after his arrival at Poplar's Court Mr. Anstruther proposed to Christina. The circumstances attending his declaration were picturesque, if not dramatic, and this appealed to the author of *No Wonder Bunkins Smiled*. There was no necessity why he should have given up half a day's hunting to declare his suit, but the sacrifice involved in this proceeding seemed suitable, romantic, and appropriate to such a serious occasion.

The hounds met on Mr. Drummond's lawn on Wednesday morning, and almost the whole of the house-party rode to the meet. Anne stayed at home with John Churchill, who, as she knew, always suffered from depression of spirits when there was a large party of guests in the house. And this gentle woman, always careful of the feelings of others, used often to slip away to the little suite of rooms in the south wing where John Churchill lived his retired, painful existence, and would pass her mornings chatting to the silent man, and soothing him with the thought—never uttered, but gently insisted upon—that no stranger's company, however welcome the stranger might be, could ever be so dear to her as the invalid man's. Dickie, too, would run in at all hours of the day; but John's reluctance to join the party downstairs was always a cause of distress to the sociable little man, and his visits were rather disturbing.

Lady George, another of those gentle women who lay,

as it were, a cool, soothing touch upon life, used to come and read to John in his pleasant sunny sitting-room; and could even persuade him, where others failed, to dine and lunch downstairs sometimes. He and Christina, with Lady Anne, were in the dining-room just now, and the room felt strangely empty after the recent days of laughter and talk round the table. Mr. Anstruther came trotting up to the door in his pink coat, and took them all by surprise. For some occult reason Bunkins seemed perfectly satisfied with himself this morning, and announced "I've returned" with a self-congratulatory air which led one to suppose that something lay behind this very obvious announcement. His sudden appearance made Anne blanch for a moment, and she went hastily to the door, exclaiming, "O Mr. Anstruther, nothing wrong, I hope! Dick? Joan?—they're really all right?" For Miss Joan used to canter about on her pony with her father nowadays, and Anne never really had a happy moment the whole time that those dearest, most irresponsible people were out of her sight. Mr. Anstruther assured her, in a few well-chosen words, that they were "as right as rain."

He drew Anne aside presently, and asked her, still in his delighted, smiling manner, if he might have the pony-cart that afternoon.

"Why, of course he might have it," Anne said. "Had he forgotten anything for the theatricals?" For Mr. Anstruther's play was going to be acted on the following night.

"No, no; ha-ha!" replied Bunkins. "Ah, you know, I wondered if you wanted anything that I could get you in Hoeford. It would be an object for a drive, wouldn't it?"

Anne admitted this, but failed to see why the pony-cart should be wanted if the object for the drive had still to be provided.

"I thought I would ask Miss M'Nab to come with me," said Bunkins; and having said so he blushed slightly, for Anne's look of wonderment was a little disconcerting. Nevertheless she provided a message to be taken to Mrs. Weeks, and Christina, upon being invited to drive, expressed her willingness to do so.

Bunkins arranged the carriage rugs around her with care—it might almost be said with impressive care—hoped twice that she was warm enough, leant across her to give the rug a final adjustment, and said to himself, "I think that gives one a lead; 'pon my word, I do. A girl cannot mistake a man's intentions if he goes wrapping her up like this."

Christina's prim, "That will do, thank you," might have been disconcerting to some men, but not to Mr. Anstruther, and a delighted "Ha-ha" was his only response.

The subject, when it actually came to the important words, was a very difficult one—an amazing difficult one—owing to the impossibility of finding an opening for beginning. In all his experience Mr. Anstruther had never met a girl who seemed to know so little of the game. He had asked her rather lamely for one of her gloves, and had been refused the request upon the utilitarian ground that "it was too cold to *do wanting* the article in question."

"Miss M'Nab," said Bunkins, after a considerable pause, "I am sure you are romantic; I see it in your eyes."

"I'm sure I am not," said Christina, in a flat, conclusive tone, which made any pursual of the subject impossible.

There was nothing for it but to ask for something again. So Bunkins proffered a request for a few of the violets which Christina wore pinned into the front of her black jacket.

"I'll give you a few when I get home," was the response; "I'm afraid I really can't be bothered unpinning them now, my hands are that cold."

Her handkerchief then. In all the love stories he had read, in all the plays he had written, the whole romance of the thing had always hinged upon the rape of a lady's handkerchief.

"What would the man want next?" wondered Christina. Was there any more of her clothing of which he wished to deprive her? First her gloves, then the flowers which she wore, and then her handkerchief—a good cambric one which Christina would have been sorry to part with. It seemed ungenerous to refuse a third request; but, after all, a handkerchief on a cold day was a necessity. "You can stop at the shop and get one," said Christina; "I'll hold the pony."

"You *won't* understand!" said Bunkins hopelessly. "Miss M'Nab," with an effort, "do you believe in love?"

"Yes," said Christina, "if it is suitable."

"Am *I* suitable?" exclaimed Bunkins, catching at a straw. "Christina—I may call you Christina, may I not?—you must have guessed, must have seen the profound—er—respect, and all that, which I feel for you—which any fellow would feel for you, in fact."

"I had not noticed it, but I am sure you are very kind."

"*Kind!* I like that. Why, with your beauty and your—I mean, with all your attractions, you might have half the fellows in England at your feet; but I do like you awfully. And if you *could* think of a poor devil like me—I mean in a matrimonial sort of way—you would make me awfully proud."

Christina wanted further enlightenment, and said, "Is this a proposal?"

"Yes, yes — by Jove, yes!" said Mr. Anstruther, delighted at getting a little assistance at last; "yes, by Jove, it is! I know it's awfully badly put, but it is a *bonâ-fide* proposal, and I offer you myself and all I've got, which is not very much, it is true."

"I am glad to have had a proposal," said Christina, with evident pleasure. "I suppose it is not considered very good taste to talk about these things, but I hope you will not mind my telling a young man of my acquaintance about it."

The reply seemed a little bit beside the mark, so to say, and it was difficult to gather from it whether it was in the affirmative or the negative.

"I hope," replied Mr. Anstruther, determinedly disposed to look on the bright side of things—"I hope that means 'Yes'?"

Christina had once advised her servant Jessie to marry a milkman in Lumboro' whose name was Sandy M'Kellar. "I think you'd better marry Sandy," she had said. To which Jessie's laconic reply was, "Hoots! what wad I dae wi' Sandy, and what wad Sandy dae wi' me?" Unfortunately, these were the only words which sug-

gested themselves at the moment to Christina ; but she tried to soften her refusal by saying, " I doubt we are not suited."

" Oh, come ! " said Mr. Anstruther, and then the pony-cart drew up at the Vicarage door, and he had to leave the important subject in the middle of it ; for Mrs. Weeks had run at them in the porch, and was playfully dragging Christina from her seat.

" *Do* come in," she cried ; " we are having *such* fun ! The mothers are here for their annual tea, and we are feasting them in the parish room. You will be charmed, Miss M'Nab, if you have not before seen anything of English rural life. The old women are as good as a play."

Still chattering, Mrs. Weeks led them into the parish room, where some thirty old women were drinking tea. Nothing in their faces nor in the viands provided suggested anything very festive in the way of a treat.

The stolid-faced women in their bonnets and shawls, munching rock cakes in a business-like way which suggested *stoking* rather than eating, and the bare tables and common tea-pots, were melancholy, and reminded one of a workhouse.

" Here," cried Mrs. Weeks, " is a lady come to see you all the way from Scotland." She spoke the words as though Christina had taken train from the north especially for this hour. " And she will tell you all about the people in her own country and their quaint, delightful ways.—Sit down, Miss M'Nab ; I am sure you have all sorts of amusing tales to tell us about the Scotch. I have myself read all those dear books about kailyards and brier bushes and things, and I know that my old women will be delighted if you will just hop up

on that little platform and give us a short account of Scottish life and character."

Christina having given an unqualified if brief refusal, Mrs. Weeks, who disliked Christina as much as one kind-hearted woman can dislike another, seemed hurt, and invited Mr. Anstruther "to get up and be funny!"

Bunkins gave Christina an overdone tragic look, and remarked that he did not feel in the mood to be funny.

Mrs. Weeks then began to try and "draw the old women out," leading up to bygone remarks of theirs which she hoped might be made again for the entertainment of her friends. "What was it your little boy said, Mrs. Jessup, when the dog bit the other little boy?"

"Well, well, now, for sure I've forgot," replied the old woman, shaking her head with the air of invulnerable stupidity which the peasant class in England always assume when asked a direct question. "But he is a bad boy, is my Tommy, and I wish I could get him from playing about with rough lads in the village."

The humorousness of this reply was certainly not overdone, and Mrs. Weeks turned disappointedly to another woman, who, with a tied-up face, and hand held to her cheek, was suffering a good deal from sweet cake having got into her rotten tooth. "What was it you were telling us about chapel the other day, Mrs. Dobson? Come now; we want to hear all about it. You remember the time when the minister preached such a long sermon, and your sister got tired?"

"Sairey said she was tired," mumbled the old woman. "I do not remember naught else that Sairey said."

"They're a little shy," whispered Mrs. Weeks to Christina; "you should just hear the funny things they say

when I get them alone ! I often tell Willie I must get a book and jot down all their remarks."

Mrs. Weeks dashed round the table to refill a cup, and handed plates of cake in a hearty manner, and with various jocose remarks which never produced a smile. "Come now, Mrs. Jones ; we can manage another little bit, can't we ? Nothing like trying. That's the way to get along—a good hearty tea, and then a romp afterwards." And in pursuance of this theory Mrs. Weeks did presently set her old women in array to play a game which she called " Gathering nuts in May."

The old women, stiff with the burden of years and of toil, put out red hard hands, upon which the wedding-ring looked imbedded with painful tightness, and essayed to draw each other across a line of chalk which Mrs. Weeks had drawn upon the wooden floor. She cheered vociferously whichever side scored a point, and shouted out encouraging words, to the intent that she had laid her last sixpence upon Mrs. Dobson, or with equal impartiality declared that her all was staked upon the opposing side.

Little Miss Weeks was turned on to play a piano—of which a few notes still sounded—to give a feeling of jollification to the entertainment. Miss Weeks had only one piece which she knew off by heart—it was the March from *Faust*—and she played it with blue fingers from end to end some thirty or forty times. The air was not inspiriting, owing to its want of consecutiveness, the condition of the piano rendering it impossible to give any air in its entirety. Little Miss Weeks played on diligently, and even sometimes sought to give variety to her performance by playing her " piece " upon different

octaves of the piano. Her taste inclined towards a contrast in light and shade, and her favourite position was to have the left hand very far down in the bass, and the right one very far up in the treble. The effect was curious, and reminded one somewhat of a Volunteer Band heard in the far distance.

And now, suddenly, the parish hall was filled with cheering; for old Mrs. Dobson had pulled old Mrs. Smith so smartly over the dividing chalk line that that latter-named stout and portly lady had fallen upon her hands and knees and hurt them badly. The applause was long and continued.

"I think we must be going," said Christina, having learnt from paying a call with Dickie that the movement to say good-bye rested on the initiative of the lady.

Mrs. Weeks protested hospitably against their departure, pressed some more tea upon them in much the same way as she would have pressed it upon her starving old women, and invited them to have a rock cake with an air of distinguished patronage.

The refreshment having been declined, Mr. Anstruther and his lady-love got into the little pony-cart again, and silence fell upon them. "*Never*," thought Bunkins—"never will I propose to a girl again at the beginning of a drive. I do not know if I ought to cry or sulk, or what I ought to do!" It was very awkward.

At last he said to Christina, "Quite comfy, eh?" And half a mile farther exclaimed, "You don't think I have been a brute, do you?"

Satisfactory but monosyllabic replies having been elicited to both questions, no other subject of con-

versation was started between them, and the drive ended lamely, as far as Bunkins was concerned.

Christina, it is true, was not disconcerted, and she entered the hall with more assurance than she had done for some days past. Every one was having tea, and no sooner was she seated than Christina discovered that Mr. Anstruther was being made the victim of much chaff from those who had seen him ride home in the middle of a good day's hunting. Christina was elated, and looked prettier than ever; not even her black straw hat with the black silk bow could entirely dim the girl's dazzling beauty. "*I could be one of the aristocracy too, if I liked,*" she was thinking, and she began to patronize Lord Hardcastle as a practical outcome of her thoughts. It was, therefore, sad for Christina that that very evening her pride should have a fall; but what was the good of being Scottish if you did not have principles? What was the good of having principles if they permitted you to play cards?

Cards were the order of that evening's amusement—cards of a very mild description, for Anne objected to playing for anything but the smallest stakes in her house. The game chosen was baccarat, with stakes of sixpence or a shilling, and there was a good deal of fun over this most idiotic of games, and very little loss or gain on either side. But the name itself was a distinct shock to Christina. In Murchison Street cards were called—with some lack of originality—"the devil's books," and baccarat was perhaps the worst form of that august personage's library. Every one sat down at the table. The ladies produced little gold purses or jewelled reticules, and the gentlemen emptied their pockets of silver and

laid it in piles in front of them; and Christina paused, horrified at the situation. Would she sacrifice principle and join this wicked, gambling rout; or would she fly from the room and refuse to return again? The ordinary excuses, such as a headache or fatigue, did not suggest themselves as a way out of the difficulty, simply because she neither had a headache nor was fatigued. Dickie was calling to her in his kindly, piping way to come and take a chair next him, and he would look after her; and Lord Hardcastle came across the room to find a chair for her.

"My lord," said Christina, raising big frightened, tearful gray eyes to his, "I do not play; I disapprove!"

"I think," said dear Barny, turning and speaking towards the table of players in his high-bred, courteous English voice—"I think Miss M'Nab and I are going to discuss South African politics together."

And Christina blessed him; while the men thought that even Barny was going to have a try for the heiress, and the ladies considered that it was rather sly of Christina thus to monopolize the favourite guest, and prevent his joining their game. No one but Barnabas ever guessed what was really in the girl's mind.

Christina's popularity was not on the increase, and not even the fact that an "Honourable" had proposed to her had sufficient power to soothe her. The guests at Popples were more than courteous; their politeness had even become a little oppressive. Lilah Anstruther never failed to take her for a perfunctory walk in the morning, Judith Campbell called her a "dear old girl," and Alice Maynard played the part of an aggressive good Samaritan. Mrs. Blake frankly snubbed her. She had

a rigid prejudice to Scotch people and a Scotch accent, and she asked Christina in a tone of irritation why she spoke so slowly. "I suppose because I am Scotch," the girl replied. "There are two sorts of Scotch people," said Mrs. Blake in a smart way: "there are Scotch people, and 'd——d' Scotch people."

Captain Stonor had begun a flirtation with Miss Campbell, as it was some one's business always to do; and Mr. Venables was excellently held in hand by Lilah Anstruther. Every one else seemed to have paired with friends or chosen companions, and Anne was much occupied with John, who had not been well lately. Dickie never failed in his good comradeship towards her, and called her invariably "the best sort in the world," with something of the same kind of cheerful hopefulness with which he called John Churchill "a gay dog."

The day after Bunkins's proposal Alice Maynard came to Christina and said, "Come to my room, childie, and let's have a nice little talk! you look so much alone." And she led her up to the big front bedroom which Alice in a playful way always successfully claimed as her own, and having settled Christina into a comfortable chair, she began to yodel at her. Alice's accomplishment had not had free scope as yet, and she yodeled until Christina asked her if that was a song.

"Oh, what am I doing?" said Miss Maynard, starting as if from a reverie; "I suppose I am yodeling. I got into the way of it in Switzerland, and I often do it here; it sounds so beautiful across the park."

"Please continue," said Christina.

To which Alice replied, "Ask me some other day, dear

childie, when I am downstairs ; it will sound better in the hall."

"Are you fond of doing it ?" asked Christina, wondering at the taste which should enjoy uttering these strange sounds.

"No, dear ; but one must be bright and sunny, and do as others like," said Alice. "Now, I am going to take you for a little walk with me and Birdie ; so get on your hat, and we shall have a nice little talk together."

As they passed through the hall in walking attire one of the gentlemen called out to Christina, "Oh, faithless woman ! you know you promised to go for a walk with me this morning." But Alice linked her arm in hers firmly, and said, with sweet playfulness, "No, no ; but I'm not going to spare her. She is coming for a walk with me, and we are going to see the gardens together."

"I always think it is so strange," she said to her companion as they started, "that some girls never seem happy unless they are with men."

"Oh, indeed," said Christina.

They wandered into the frosty kitchen garden, and there they met Mr. Rivers, smoking his cigar. The walls of the garden were high, and the gooseberry bushes were bare ; yet a quick eye might have seen that these means of escape and concealment were both glanced at by Mr. Rivers before he advanced with a guilty air and remarked to Miss Maynard, "I have been looking for you, as I promised to show you the golden pheasants."

"Let us go now," said Alice, dropping Christina's arm. "I am sure you would like to take me to see the pheasants, and I must not break my promise of going with you, you know."

Mr. Rivers naturally suggested that Christina should go too; but Alice said, "Oh no; we have *quite* finished our little chat—haven't we? and you won't mind running home now, childie, will you?"

So Christina returned to the house. She went to help Lady George to prepare some dresses for the theatricals that night, and then assisted Anne to receive the numerous guests who drove over to an informal dinner-party before the play began.

Dinner was an unusually silent meal, as nearly every one was conning inwardly his or her own part in the play which was to follow in the evening. Dickie, by his own request, was to act as a footman upon the stage, and it had taken him full two days to arrange his attire. He had one sentence to speak, and this he was so much afraid of forgetting that he muttered it audibly the whole of dinner-time. Every one was a little bit nervous, and Joan, who had been allowed to dine downstairs and sit up late, was almost the only person who provided conversation. Joan's dreams, the recitation of which was a constant source of apprehension and alarm to her friends, seemed to have been of an unusually interesting character lately.

"I dreamt last night," she began in her shrill treble, bobbing her sandy curls about until they flicked her cheek—"I dreamt last night that William married my nurse"—William, one of the footmen, retreated precipitately from the room, but was met by a remorseless butler, who turned him back at the door—"I dreamt that Mr. Weeks married them with one of my bead rings, and they had a baby, and everything, and it ate up all their wedding-cake."

“Joan,” said her father (ceasing for a moment to murmur, “What time would your lordship like the carriage this evening, and shall I put out the lights?”)—“Joan,” he repeated in a terrible voice, “I forbid you to dream any more of those ridiculous dreams again.”

Joan laughed. - “But that dream is not nearly so funny as one I had the other night. I dreamt that our kitten——”

“Joan,” said Lady Anne, “I think, my darling, you are talking too much.”

Fans and gloves were picked up early, and the ladies sailed from the room to prepare for the theatricals.

The play was very clever, with that unexpected cleverness which always astonished Christina in the silly folk whom she met in England. It was abominably acted, and every one was delighted with his or her own performance. Captain Stonor did a skirt dance which brought the house down; and Dickie entirely forgot the two sentences which he had to speak—he waited for the prompters’ assistance, and then walked across to the wings, remarking in a loud voice, “I cannot hear a word you say.” These were mere trifles.

Mrs. Weeks, who wrote a report of the evening’s entertainment to the local paper, described it as being “one of the most successful performances which have ever taken place in our neighbourhood.” “It was difficult,” she went on, “in the face of so much excellence, to decide who should bear away the palm for skill in acting. Miss Campbell had shown a knowledge of her part which was beyond all praise; while Miss Anstruther,” etc., etc. Each person—singly and severally—got a tribute of praise, not only in Mrs.

Weeks's report, but in the general plaudits which followed *No Wonder Bunkins Smiled*. Bunkins himself, poor man, was divided between a desire to look broken-hearted for the sake of Miss M'Nab and the necessity for appearing as happy and jolly as the exigencies of the play demanded. It was a horrible situation, and Bunkins wavered for a little time between a face of woe and one of jollity. At length, inspired by a brilliant idea, he contrived to whisper to Miss M'Nab, "Remember, I am an actor before everything !"

The evening closed with dancing, in which every one took part in their theatrical costumes. The Lancers were, according to Dickie's instructions, "as *kitchen* as they could possibly be;" the polka was "polked" at racing speed; Sir Roger de Coverley developed into a romp; and even waltzes were conducted with giddy rapidity.

The Misses Lumley, with their long hair flying, were whirling down the room with this man and with that. Lilah Anstruther—ladylike, neat, and smiling—could still look ladylike, neat, and smiling after having rushed through Sir Roger in her milkmaid's dress. Judith Campbell, with cheeks like red roses, was at every one's demand, and had given away waltzes and polkas indiscriminately, leaving her partners to fight it out when the dances began. Only Christina, in her awful gentility, and with her "Academy" steps and her high black silk dress, seemed to be a failure.

She stood by the doorway, accepting invitations to dance with formality, and walking through the figures of the Lancers in an exact and measured way. She went in to supper, and uttered a few platitudes over

her glass of lemonade, made her monosyllabic answers with the truthfulness of the Scottish born, lagged after Dick in his wildest gallopading, and was overlooked by every one except those whom kindness and courtesy sent in her way.

The band stopped at last ; the lights were put out ; carriages rolled away on the crunching gravel by the hall door ; girls finished their laughter and jokes—finished throwing Christmas roses playfully across the hall at some departing guest—and went back to the ballroom and danced at last in the dark, Dickie thumping on the piano, and a few couples colliding against each other in one last light-hearted round of jollity. Bedroom candles were lit, and Lilah Anstruther blew them all out again in a playful, ladylike way which made nobody smile. Eyes looked bright, or loving, or coquettish above the flame of the candle as the procession went upstairs ; and Christina followed them, the last of all, and went soberly to her bed. First of all, she had a long cry—a cry that sounded even through the pocket-handkerchief she pressed to her face ; a lonely, bitter, disappointed, girlish cry, without any stint of tears. And then Christina, with her red hair falling about her and lying in ripples of foam about her white shoulders, raised her head from the pillow in which she had buried her face, and rising and taking a long defiant look into the mirror by her side, clenched her white fists, and exclaimed, “ *I won't play at this any longer ! I'll just be myself, and I don't care what they say. A fig for Mrs. Blake and her snubbing, aristocratic ways ! I will be Scotch—I'll be d——d Scotch—and I'll make it the fashion too !* ”

CHAPTER VIII.

CHRISTINA went first of all and consulted Lilah Anstruther on the subject of clothes. "I do not think I am quite grand enough," she said simply, "and I really would like to spend some money, if you would advise me what to get."

"My dear," cried Lilah delightedly, "I have dressed you in imagination a dozen times, and it won't take me five minutes to advise you what to get. Trouble! I love it. Go to my woman; she will do anything for a friend of mine. We ought to telegraph in the first instance, and write by the early post."

The telegram cost ten shillings to send (it was well worth the amount), and the morning was spent in Miss Anstruther's room with a maid, who measured and snipped, and cut out muslin patterns and bodice shapes and skirt-lengths with admirable skill and all-absorbed interest. As none of Christina's own dresses were a good fit, these were not sent as a guide to the dress-maker; but the clever-fingered maid put in bones, took out pleats, and manipulated yards of stiff muslin into wonderful patterns.

"Don't let us tell any one about this," said Lilah, with girlish excitement. "Madame Parkins will send some of your things immediately, I know; and you'll let me do your hair the first night, won't you?"

"I'm just as pretty as ever I was," said Christina

simply ; " I do not care what Colin says to the contrary. I think it has just been my black clothes that has made me look so queer-like and dowdy."

She had relapsed into her native Scotch dialect, and words came to her more easily in that language.

" You are lovely," said Lilah, kissing her. " Just wait till the boxes arrive ! "

And when these interesting boxes actually did arrive, with fans and gloves, and silk stockings, and lace petticoats and gowns, Jessie and Christina walked round the bed where they were laid with a sort of solemn reverence in their steps. Item number one : a mysterious black dress, unrelieved with a touch of white, and looking like a night-cloud, soft and dim. Item number two : a dress of pure white crêpe, its only ornament a flashing silver girdle. Item number three : a dress of white chiffon, so soft and fine that it looked as though one might draw it through a wedding-ring ; but when worn it shook itself out in cloudy billows and rippled waves, and drifted to the floor in white foam. Item number four : a picture dress that recalled some old oil painting, with a broad sash, and a tiny black ribbon round the neck. Then, hats with drooping feathers ; fans of gauze with paintings upon them ; satin shoes and kid gloves.

" Whether in mourning or not," said Lilah, as she dressed her on the evening that the dresses arrived, " you must never wear anything but black or white, my dear. The only bit of colour about you ought to be in your hair and in your cheeks. Oh, but you are going to be splendid !" she cried, retreating a few steps back from the work of her hands and surveying it

delightedly. "Just one more hairpin. I wish my hair grew in waves like this. Please, *never, never* put it into those stiff plaits again. Will you wait for me while I dress, and let's go down to dinner together? No, I shan't be late. Dinner is a little later to-night, as Anne has had a telegram from Southwark to say that he is coming." She flew down the corridor, and knocked at Judith Campbell's door. "I've got a revelation for you all to-night," she cried. "Put on your oldest gown, Ju, and let us act as foils to the heiress!"

"My good woman," replied Miss Campbell, "I have two gowns, on which I have rung the changes ever since I came to Poplar's Court. It is true I have tried to deceive you all, by means of fichus and flowers, that my dresses occasionally varied; but I cannot think that I have ever deceived *you* upon this subject, and I consider your request superfluous."

"You always look an angel," said Lilah, kissing her; "wear the black gown to-night without the fichu." She hastened on to her own room, and told her maid to put away the rose-coloured satin that lay in readiness on the bed, and ordered her brown evening dress. "We must all be dimmed to-night, Dickson," she said, "and Miss M'Nab must shine." She finished her toilet as the gong sounded, and went to fetch Christina from her room.

They crossed the hall together; but Christina paused at the door of the reception-room. "I'm *blate*," she said shyly.

"Late? I'm rather glad we are late," said Lilah darkly. She was full of good-natured excitement at the surprise she had in store for her friends, and gave

Christina a playful push to make her go first into the room.

It was the custom at Poplar's Court to assemble for dinner in a room called the Gallery. The pictures that had once hung there had most of them disappeared long ago to pay Dickie's debts in his bachelor days; but the natural beauty of the room did not require any ornament. The ceiling of heavy carved oak had a massive cornice, and the panels of the walls were carved with quaint devices. The windows were high up in the walls, and the floors were of black polished wood. Nearer the large fireplace the room had a more inhabited air. Its principal use nowadays was to be a music-room; and a piano, a harp, some tall screens, and various musical instruments were collected there. The room was lit with candles, and the door was at the farther end.

Lilah had heralded her coming with her pretty lady-like laugh, and the eyes of the company were drawn towards the entrance. Down the long gallery came Christina in all her loveliness. The clinging diaphanous white gown fell about her with something of the gracefulness and ease of falling water. It trailed behind her, and was reflected in long, smooth white streaks on the dark floor. Some one who was poetically inclined said that Christina looked like some lovely swan sailing over dark water. Slowly, with reluctant feet, the girl came up the long vista of the beautiful room. Her misty red hair was rolled into a knot, and hung low on her neck—in colour like burnished copper. A pink flush had flamed up into her face, and a shy consciousness of her own beauty made her gray eyes dim.

"By George! it's Miss M'Nab," said Dickie. At first no one had known who it was. It was difficult to restrain him from public congratulation at the sight of so much beauty; and it was next to impossible not to stare at the floating white figure, crowned with the burnished hair.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Bunkins, and he began to feel his disappointment of a few days ago keenly.

Mrs. Blake said in her sharp way, "My dear, what have you done with yourself?" and thought she would take Christina out in London next season.

Barny found a seat for her on an oak settle out of range of the battery of eyes. "We cannot help staring at you to-night," he said (because it was so very obvious that everybody was staring); "you've got on a very pretty gown, haven't you?"

"It was Miss Anstruther's choice," faltered Christina, hanging her head; "I never wore a low gown before now."

"You shouldn't have kept this dark," said Judith, passing her with a good-natured little pinch. "To-morrow I shall raid your bedroom, and find what else you've got."

Then they all stood up to go in to dinner; and Lady Anne said, "I am afraid Southwark cannot be coming." But just then the duke—otherwise called "Tim," after one of his country seats, Timworth Castle in the shires—entered the room. He was a happy, clean-looking boy with red hair; and he shook hands in a hearty, smiling way with several friends in the group by the fire.

Anne said, "My brother Southwark, Miss M'Nab;"

and the duke shook hands, and said something which sounded like "Ha ah ya?"

There had been some exchange of cotillon rosettes in the interval before dinner, when the pairing of couples to go into the dining-room had been decided; and the Duke of Southwark now handed Christina a ribbon, and said, "They tell me the white rosette belongs to you, Miss M'Nab."

"I went in to dinner to-night on the duke's arm," Christina wrote that night in her letter to Scotland, "and every one said that there was no one as pretty as me in all the room! The duke is a very nice young man, and we had plenty of conversation together." To which letter an answer came back in the course of a few days, saying, "You had better set your cap at the duke; he's better than a lord. And he might be glad of your tocher, as I hear he is very poor." Wishing her all success, Colin remained her affectionate friend.

That evening at Popples was the pleasantest, as it was the last, of the house-party. And the triumph of it was all Christina's. Her low-spoken remarks were full of native wit, and were asked for again and again: "What does she say? What was that, Miss M'Nab?" Every one wanted to listen to Christina. She was surrounded by a group of gentlemen after dinner, and had an answer for every one of their sallies—shy spoken, it is true, but full of "pawky" humour, which was irresistible. Her Scottish accent was delightful, and her beauty had all the fascination of novelty, even of discovery.

"And to think it's the last night!" Bunkins mur-

mured to himself. "If only we had been staying a little longer, I might have had another chance."

One of Christina's crowd of admirers was trying to engage her attention by a little mild chaff about her Scottish descent, and the girl had begun to tell a story of the Clan M'Nab.

"You know you were all cattle-lifters and robbers," said the chaffing admirer.

"We were cattle-lifters and robbers to some purpose," answered Christina, and with an adorable mixture of shyness and pride she began to tell the story of the Clan Neish and the M'Nabs:—

"The M'Nabs had been across the hills to the town for their winter provisions, when the Clan Neish overtook them in numbers that could not be gainsaid, and they fought all that day till they were sore spent, and many of the red tartans were lying on the ground. And when they came back to their castle and the old chief, they were a very small band indeed, and all the provisions were gone——"

"*Proveesions!*" murmured one man of the group, in an aside; "isn't she delightful?"

"When the old chief heard about it, he said nothing at all, and the women folk came and bound up the wounds of their lads, and they were all for revenging themselves upon the Clan Neish. But the old chief never gave them the word to fight; so they fretted, and nursed their wounds till far on into the winter, when the days were short. And at last one night the old chief rose up in his place—the night was mirk and stormy, and the hills were covered with snow—he rose up and went to the door and looked out into the dark-

ness, and then he said quite slowly, 'The nicht was the nicht, if the lads were the lads!' They needed no second bidding, for they had been impatient for long and long, and they wanted no other word from the chief; but they got their great boat which lay in the loch, and they put their strong shoulders to it, and carried that boat right over to the far loch, which is the loch of the Neishes. They launched her at the mouth of the glen, where the river flows down into the waters, and they came with great surprise upon the Neishes, who were feasting in their hall, and smote them every one, till there was no Clan Neish left at all——"

"Bravo, Clan M'Nab!" said some one.

"And when they would be getting home to their own castle hall," went on Christina, "the old man was waiting for them just as they had left him, looking for them to come back across the hills. So they laid their spoils at his feet, and told the number of the slain to him, and spoke of the maidens they had brought home with them, and the household stuffs and the silver, and all the fame of it. And the old man said, 'The nicht was the nicht, and the lads *were* the lads;' and the M'Nabs were content."

"That was a gran' story," said the duke, as Christina finished. He asked her to give him some lessons in the Scottish tongue; but she reminded him that he ought first to learn to speak English as it was written.

"Quite good, quite good!" chorussed the rest of the party, speaking the words in the short, clipping, fashionable way, which reminds one a little of the quacking of a duck.

And then Alice Maynard, who did not think that so

much attention was good for Christina, suggested that they should play a game in which each person tells a part of the story and stops where he likes, his neighbour being obliged to take up the thread of the tale and continue it where it is left off.

"Women always choose these sort of games," grumbled Mr. Venables—"they know they can play them far better than men can; and they get beastly little bits of paper and pencils, and you have to think about some infernal rhyme or the name of a town or something, just when you want to spend a happy evening, and not to be bothered."

"No paper or pencils required," said Alice, settling the company into a group; "one only has to tell the story in turn."

She began a sentimental tale about a knight and his lady-love; and there seemed to be some beautiful parable running all through it, which yet it was quite impossible to catch.

Bunkins took up the thread of the tale by saying, "The knight loved the lady more than he could ever find words to say." He looked unutterable things at Christina, and declared that his part of the story was finished. "Go on," he said in a sepulchral tone, and gave Mr. Drummond a shove.

"So they went to the castle together," went on Dickie, "and there they lived, feeling awfully fit and jolly and happy. They had three sweet kids.....I believe I'm bringing the story to an end too suddenly," he said, pulling himself up.

"Besides, you know, you haven't married them yet," said the duke.

"Anne, I didn't say that," said Dickie, turning to his wife

Anne smiled, and said, "Let's go back to the wood, Dickie, where the knight finds the lady."

"Well, he found her," pursued Dickie. "There were heaps of chaperons everywhere about, and the lady rode on a milk-white steed. One of the chaperons—it was a most curious thing—turned out to be the knight's mother.—I don't think I will go on, Anne; I am certain I shall put my foot in it," finished the historian lamely.

Judith continued. "The lady was a ripper. She had hair which fell down far past her waist, and she rode on a milk-white steed. They rode till they came to the castle, and they went inside, and there was a beautiful dinner spread out for them——"

"I want to go on now," said Dickie, "because I know this is a bit I can do. There was a perfectly beautiful dinner: the wines were all of the very best vintage, and there were stewed ortolans, quails, and aspic, boar's head, omelet done with that awfully nice rum sauce, you know, and boned turkey with chestnuts—I forgot the soup. There was——"

"Oh, some one sit on Dickie's head," said Lord Hardcastle.—"It's your turn, Mrs. Blake."

"The story has been most uninteresting so far," said Mrs. Blake; "I am going to try and put a little adventure into it. After dinner was over, and the cloth had been removed by invisible hands, the knight and lady went out into the garden in the dazzling moonlight. Here they found a ball going on"—("They are quite losing sight of my little parable," whispered Alice to

Anne)—“and all the knights and esquires for miles around had come to it. A beautiful invisible band played under the trees. Now, it so happened that a wicked fairy had been asked to come to the party—no, she had not been asked; she had come without an invitation—and she said to the footman at the door that she was a friend of the family. And she suddenly raised her wand and turned all the knights present into enormous green frogs.—Now, you go on, duke.”

The duke cleared his throat. “So the frogs began running races” (he was a sporting man), “and the biggest frog could jump six feet at one bound; but he was heavily handicapped, because one of the rules of the course was that if you could jump six feet at a bound, you had to carry so many stone, don’t you know——”

“You didn’t say the frogs were being ridden by anything,” interrupted Dickie.

“Oh, well, they were: they were being ridden by the ladies, who had all turned into mice——”

“And how many stone did they put on to the mouse who rode the high jumper?” inquired Mr. Drummond, who liked to be exact in these things.

“Well, you see, the handicapper was rather a queer chap,” said the duke, rubbing his head in perplexity. “The handicapper was a jackdaw, and lived quite close——”

“What was the jackdaw before it was turned into a jackdaw?” asked Judith Campbell.

“I do not think it was anything except an egg,” replied the duke. “You see the jackdaw didn’t belong to the Jockey Club—I mean the fairy didn’t; the jackdaw did all right——”

"I wish you'd get your frogs started, old man," said Barnabas.

The duke began again. "Well, they sprinted, and they sprinted, and they sprinted; but the odd part of it all was that although it was a flat race, being frogs, they had to jump——"

"Tim," said Lady George, "I think you are getting a little involved. Don't you think Anne had better go on?"

Anne thought she ought to try, for dear Alice's sake, to bring the story back into an improving parable. She said, "The rule of the race was that whoever won was turned back into a knight again, and his rider, the mouse, into a beautiful lady. Now, if these two had loved each other always very dearly, and continued to be faithful and true, they had the power of restoring every one else to their original shape again."

"The power of love," murmured Alice sentimentally.

Christina had been wondering what she could say when it came to her turn to contribute her paragraph to the idiotic story. She leant her chin on her hand, deeply cogitating. The smart imbecilities of the English always seemed so absolutely beyond her. "Say something kind," whispered Bunkins in her ear, in a sentimental voice. Anne looked at her encouragingly.

"I'm afraid," said Christina slowly, "that the knight and the lady did not love each other well enough, so the frogs and the mice remained frogs and mice."

And Bunkins said, "That's too cruel."

The story now got into inextricable confusion, owing principally to the fact that whenever it came to Dickie's turn to relate a portion of it the subject-matter was

always that of food, while the duke's as invariably turned to sport. Alice made acrobatic efforts to return to the parable; and Captain Stonor having, at the eleventh hour, introduced a perfectly new character into the story in the person of a tutor (he was called a tutor because he was living in a Tudor house), who wore false teeth, which he always lost at the critical moment, it was felt that the limitations of the art of fiction had been attained, and Alice said, "I have always felt that I could write a book if only I had the time for it. Good-night."

CHAPTER IX.

ALL the guests left Poplar's Court the following day, except the Duke of Southwark, who exercised his privilege as a brother, and a late-comer, to remain on a little longer. He was delighted with Christina's beauty and her wit, and he wrote long accounts of both in his daily letters to the girl he was not engaged to. The duke had not seen Christina in her chrysalis state; he had arrived on the night of her triumph, when she had emerged and spread her white wings to the sunshine of approval that greeted her development. He had joined in the general chorus of praise at once, and continued it heartily when the rest of the chorus had departed.

Meanwhile Popples had returned to its normal state—its "pristine dullness" as Dickie called it. The hired servants took their departure, and John emerged from his room to take his accustomed place downstairs again. Joan returned to her lessons, and Dickie was absorbed in the construction of new pigsties, built on an approved plan of his own, and he spent all his days watching their construction. Anne redoubled her attentions—which had, of necessity, lapsed a little lately—to the invalid, and the duke constituted himself Christina's companion and guide, and his delighted laugh could be heard all over the house whenever he and she were together. He drove her about the country in the little cart which had been the scene of Bunkins's declaration;

and Christina, having decided, with her usual calmness and decision, that a duke was exactly what she wanted, encouraged the young man in a calm business-like way which was as unlike coquetry or flirting as any commercial transaction of the late lamented maker of tubes could be. Christina wanted a duke; the duke wanted a fortune. What could be more sensible than that each should suit him and herself, when the pleasant fulfilment of their wishes was in each case ready to hand? When, therefore, Tim said to her, "I wish you knew my mother, Miss M'Nab; you would make her laugh, and I know she would like you immensely," Christina replied, "She had better ask me to stay with her." And Tim, delighted, promised that the invitation should be forthcoming. When he suggested that Christina should give him her photograph, she replied with something of the promptitude of a tradesman whose custom has been sought, "Sairtainly, with pleasure!" and went up to her room that moment to fetch it. Never was a lady less coy or bashful! The duke called her the frankest, jolliest girl he had ever met—such a come-at-able sort of girl; and yet she never rushed you, as some girls did! She was very accommodating. One day as he leant over her in the little pony-cart to tuck in the rugs with his big hands in their huge dogskin gloves, it just suggested itself to him to wonder whether, if he asked Christina for a kiss, it would be given to him with the same willingness as were the other favours he requested of her. But he refrained in time, thinking that the girl he was not engaged to might not like it. He said to her instead, "Do write to me sometimes when I go away; it would be ripping of you, and I

am sure your letters would be awfully amusing and jolly."

And Christina said, "Sairtainly!" and with her admirable business-like ways produced a pocket-book, and took down his address. Why pretend that you were not pleased to write to a duke, if the exercise gave you satisfaction? She would write to him—yes! She would also give to him—had given to him her photograph. But was not the affair progressing rather in friendliness than in what might strictly speaking be called love? Jessie thought so. It would be understating the case to say that Jessie was a privileged servant. She was one who was self-enfranchised to say and do exactly as she pleased upon every given occasion. She had brought Christina up when the girl's mother died, and this proceeding would seem to warrant the liberty and indulgence in free speech to which there is no limit. In her eyes Christina was still a child, and her love for her had about it that something maternal which is both protective and didactic. Jessie watched the whole campaign with deepest interest, and one evening as she sat in Christina's arm-chair by the fire, during the hour which she spent with that young lady before dinner, and during which time she faithfully retailed all the gossip of the housekeeper's room, with her own comments thereupon, she said, "Hoots, lassie, it's my belief you're no half romantic enough! Your puir mither had your papaw in half the time that you and the juke take to think about it. And there wad be valentines between them, and posies, and what not. He wad read poetry to her tae, oot in the gairden in the gloamin'; and that is a gran'

thing, as I understand, for making your lad come forward. Talk about the fields or the hills, or something in nature : a man canna resist that. And I will lend you a book with verses I've got, with suitable quotations."

"You've never got a husband yourself, Jessie," said Christina sharply.

But the next day, when driving with the duke, she experimented upon Jessie's advice. First of all, she unbuttoned her jacket, and handed him some flowers she wore, remarking matter-of-factly, "There's a bunch of violets for you."

"How sweet of you!" said Tim, and fastened them into his coat. "Did you get these for me?"

"Jessie pulled them," said Christina truthfully.

"Then you've both been sweet," said Tim impartially.

Conversation did not flow quite so easily this afternoon. Christina was painfully preparing romantic utterances, which she was too shy to bring forth, and the effort of constructing them tied her tongue meanwhile.

"The sky is looking sort of red to-night," she said at last.

"Yes, awf'ly jolly," said the duke.

"And the trees are not so bad—for England."

"For England, eh? Ha-ha!"

Christina wished she had not refused Jessie's offer of a book of verse with suitable quotations. She scraped her throat, and said, "I like flowers; do you?"

"Awf'ly, yes!"

"They are so full of poetry," hazarded Christina.

"Chock-full," said Tim, "How awf'ly clever of you to think of flowers being full of poetry! It is an awf'ly jolly idea, I think."

"Though I do not know a bit what it means," said Christina, relapsing into truthfulness as usual.

"Oh, come, I think there's a lot in it. It means if you see a rose, or a gardenia, or a peach, or anything, you feel inclined to write verses about it—at least, if you are the sort of chap that is taken that way. I never wrote two lines in my life myself."

"I adore green gooseberries," said Christina. They found that it was a weakness of both from childhood, and the bond was a strong one. The duke had never been allowed to eat the skins. Were the same restrictions imposed upon Christina? Yes, precisely. At one time Jessie used to count the "grosettes," and afterwards count the skins to see that none had been swallowed.

"How interesting!" said the duke.

There is something very soothing in hearing that one's infantile experiences regarding green gooseberries are interesting, and it is exhilarating to have one's smallest jokes, one's most innocent, matter-of-fact remarks, met with applause and laughter.

When the duke left Poplar's Court, Christina missed him very much. The house felt empty and dull without his delightful laugh, his cheery whistle, and snatches of song—out of tune—from the *Belle of New York*, and the hearty, healthy look which the young man carried about with him everywhere. Christina felt decidedly dull, and Jessie exclaimed with a burst of delighted pleasure, "Lassie, you're in love." This was a new aspect of the affair, and Christina cherished it. It warranted her thinking of the duke, and writing him long letters nearly every day. The days were longer now,

and more spring-like; the pigsties were finished, and Mr. Drummond talked of nothing but bulbs.

Christina had no idea until she came to share in English country-house life that one single topic of conversation could be made to go so far, or do duty for so many conversations. When pigsties were uppermost in Mr. Drummond's thoughts, pigsties—three particular pigsties—could be made the subject for earnest discussion at breakfast-time, at luncheon-time, and again at dinner. If the Weekses had influenza, one not only heard daily how the Weekses were getting on, but most persons when they came to call remarked soon after they had entered the drawing-room, "I suppose you know the Weekses have got influenza?" and the matter was discussed from every possible point of view. In the summer-time the delinquencies of the head-gardener were generally the accompaniment for every meal—not those of one summer in particular, when the gardener was particularly bad, or his delinquencies more than usually glaring, but in each recurring summer; and as fresh vegetables came into season, the same remarks were made with unfailing punctuality—"I saw plenty of asparagus in the garden this morning; why does not Smith bring it in? The strawberries are wasting; is Mrs. Jones going to make it into jam, or should Mr. Drummond try to sell them in Hoeford, or should he simply sit still and allow himself to be ruined, as was generally the case?" The Penny Reading had furnished mental food for many a long day, and the comment thereupon, "We had *quite* a pleasant evening at the Weekses' the other night," was spoken with an air of freshness and novelty every morn-

ing at breakfast for days after. That the newly-planted apple-trees had come unstaked in a recent storm was matter not only of conversation but of vivid excitement to the whole household. Mr. Drummond was generally to be seen at an early hour on the morning after a high wind (it was indeed generally supposed that Dickie was with difficulty restrained from rising in the middle of the night on these occasions), hatless and excited, racing towards the orchards to discover whether his fool of a bailiff had really allowed the apple-trees to break away from the stakes, as he apprehended. On the days following these early mornings the apple-trees and apple-tree stakes had it all their own way. The conversational pathway was strewn, as it were, with apple-trees, and their dependent or independent stakes, and it was impossible to dislodge them from it. And it often happened that when the evening lamps were lit, Dickie would with fresh vigour begin, as if stating an important piece of news—"I had to see about those apple-trees this morning;" and the bailiff, and the apple-trees, and the stakes were once more piled on the top of each other, and blocked the entire horizon. In March, as regularly as March came round, the topic of conversation, not only at Poplar's Court, but at all the neighbouring houses where Christina visited, the talk was of bulbs. Christina had never known before that so many words could be spoken upon this one particular subject. It was the greeting when friend met friend in the lane—"How are the bulbs?" and the most inclement and irritating form of wet weather was hailed cheerfully when it was good for the bulbs. (Blow the bulbs!) Even Anne, on being asked how her hus-

band was, would generally reply, "Oh, he is very well indeed, thank you; he is so interested about his bulbs at present," as though Dickie's health depended for some mysterious reason upon tulips and hyacinths. The crocuses had flamed upwards like little points of fire under the trees in the park, and had been visited every day with ceremony by the whole party, although they could be distinctly seen from the dining-room windows. Hyacinths and Lent lilies had taken their place, and now some undressed-looking, flesh-coloured tulips "for their morning sup of heavenly verdure from the soil looked up" and wrapped green leaves about their throats, to protect themselves from the chilly winds of spring. The mud in the country roads was deeper than ever now, but to the agricultural mind the season was everything that could be desired. And Christina, as she took her daily constitutional with Dickie, used to listen to his self-congratulations thereon. "It's been a capital season in every way," said Dickie, with his usual optimism. "There was that touch of frost early in the month when all the pipes froze—just what we wanted. Now here is lovely open weather, more like May than April. I have never known the bulbs do better. Have you seen the border of red tulips in the kitchen garden walk this morning? We might walk up that way, if you care about it; and then I should just like to go round by the pigsties." Did Christina know that old hog which he had let the butcher at Hoeford have at Christmas-time weighed twenty-five score? Not a pound less; twenty-five score did that hog weigh! "We might just run back to the house for the sticks, don't you think? They like having their backs scratched."

Christina and Mr. Drummond gravely scratched the pigs' backs for some ten minutes, and the family life and upbringing of little pigs was frankly discussed. They then went home to tea.

"To-morrow," said Mr. Drummond cheerily, "I think we might walk along the Much-Benham Road, instead of the Hoeford Road; it will be a nice change."

Either it was dull, or Christina was in love. She cherished the latter explanation. The greater part of her mornings was usually passed in John Churchill's room. A curious teasing friendship had grown up between these two, and nothing brightened the invalid man more than Christina's quick repartee and ready wit. To the rest of the world John was still the sad, quiet man he ever was; but Dick and his wife had the key to his sadness, and Christina's beauty and freshness were something pleasant to look forward to in the morning hours.

Anne said to her apologetically, "Dick and I would like so much to have another little house-party, but I am really afraid Mr. Churchill is hardly strong enough for it."

"John has just got one of his little bad times," said Dickie quickly. "He has got such a good constitution that he feels these little ups and downs, but he will be all right in a day or two."

"Still, I think we might have a few friends to dinner," said Anne kindly. "Is there any one in particular you would care about asking to come?"

"Thank you," said Christina; "I should be glad if your brother could come."

"I'll ask him," said Anne; "he may be able to run

down for the night. And we could have the Weekses and Miss Lumley, and one or two of our other neighbours."

The duke did come down for the night, and the Weekses accepted with pleasure; the Lumleys with pleasure, if their horses had recovered from colds; a few other neighbours with the same pleasure, and with the variety of conditions imposed upon accepting any invitation in the country. (Oh for a few cabs, some street lamps, and solid pavements!)

The duke arrived by the 4.15 train, bringing with him an atmosphere of good-humour and jollity which seemed inseparable from the fresh-looking, red-headed young man. He had news to tell of every one, which he allowed to burst forth in the intervals of helping himself to fresh muffins and pound-cake. His face, red, wet, and shiny after a drive from the station in stinging rain, beamed cheerfully over his tea-cup, and his honest blue eyes, with their light lashes and sandy brows, were full of a frank enjoyment which had something infectious in it. The young Duke of Southwark was a person whom the world treated very well. It had smiled upon him from his birth, and he had smiled back confidently upon it. The rubs or snubs which had beset the path of other young men had never been experienced by him. He took his poverty light-heartedly, and he had by nature so few extravagant tastes that it cost him very little self-sacrifice to live on "twopence a year, paid quarterly," which was all he said he possessed! He was an honest-hearted English youth, free from care, and without a morbid thought in his head. His brain power could perhaps best be described by the simple device of a circle O, but then nearly all the best fellows he knew

were fools, so it really didn't matter much. A pillow-fight in the corridors in the dark, or a big night at Mess with plenty of "ragging" or "rotting" were his highest form of intellectual amusement; but no one could deny that he was a dear boy, and probably he did as much good and as little harm as any other young fellow of his position and power.

"But I have forgotten my best bit of news," he said, slapping his knee, and with his mouth full of muffins. "Guess who is going to be married? Alice Maynard!"

"God help the man who is joined to oor Dawvid," said Dick in an exaggerated Scottish accent, quoting the words of the old Scotchwoman who thus exclaimed upon hearing that her son was to be sent to the galleys.

Tim shouted with laughter. "I believe the happy man is a clergyman," he said.

"He will need all the grace he can get to put up with Alice," said Christina in her matter-of-fact voice. She had been sorely tried by Miss Maynard's patronage, and really thought that only a clergyman endowed with much forbearance could live happily with her.

Tim laughed again, as he did upon most occasions. Had any one heard of Bunkins lately? Some one had told him that he was writing a new play—a tragedy of the deepest gloom—and that Bunkins was supposed to be in love with some one! Judith Campbell and Captain Stonor were really in love with each other—so people said. Certainly Bildad was a young man almost as poor as even Judith could approve. If he had to go through the Bankruptcy Court, as seemed more than likely, her friends believed that Judith would certainly marry him.

Anne entered with an open letter in her hand, and

her eyes tearful and shining. "I've got *such* a piece of news," she said, "by the late post. Dear Alice is engaged to be married." She looked round for sympathy, and three guilty people murmured that they hoped Miss Maynard would be happy. "I am so delighted about it," said Anne, furtively wiping a tear out of her eye; "dear Alice is the best of women, and will make any man happy. Of course her life will be full of responsibility. Fancy, five children!"

"Five children?" said Dick.

"Her *fiancé* is a widower with five children," said Lady Anne, with one of her delightful blushes; and Dick took her hand in a sneaking way and kissed it. "I am going to send you all off to dress for dinner at once," she went on.

"Bags I the hot bath in your dressing-room, Dickie?" said the duke.

—"For you know there are some people coming to dine to-night."

"Not aborigines," exclaimed Tim. "My dear Anne, you should have broken this to me more gently.—Miss M'Nab, will you sit next me, and hold my hand at dinner-time?"

"Sairtainly," said Christina; then blushed, and added, "What nonsense you talk!"

She put on her prettiest dress—the one copied from an old picture—with a narrow black velvet band round her white neck, and a little miniature pendent therefrom, and sailed down to the drawing-room to help Anne receive her guests.

The gentlemen arrived in that state of fussy irritation which the act of dining with their friends in the country

seems to arouse in the male breast—the mood which says as plainly as possible, “I did not bring this suffering upon myself. On my wife’s head let the penalty lie.” He orders the carriage early, and calls after the departing coachman in a voice that is plainly audible throughout the house, “Do not be late, Gregson !” His wife looks crushed, but firm, like some substance whose quality of resistance increases by being trodden upon. She has decided during the long drive from their own to their neighbour’s house that men are *too selfish*. She has not had on a decent evening gown for months, and she *won’t*—no, she *won’t*—give in to refusing every evening invitation in the future. They (the brutal sex) snare rabbits, or shoot game, or hunt foxes all day, while she sits at home, orders her husband’s dinner, writes to the “Staws,” or on her gayest and most dissipated days takes the children to their dancing-class in the neighbouring town. And now, when for one evening a friend offers a variation to the domestic duet, there is all this fuss and bad temper ! Madam enters the house as ill-humoured as her lord, but the ill-humour is of a more majestic order. She smooths her hair, and says to her image in the glass, “And I am still a handsome woman !” and sweeps into the drawing-room in front of her husband, while he stumbles over her train.

Dick enjoys nothing so much as a dinner-party in his own house. He has arranged different menus every day for the last week, until the day before the dinner-party, when, having reduced his cook, whom he has personally visited, to a state of mind bordering on insanity, he has magnanimously handed over “the whole show” to Anne. His delighted welcome to each of his guests is slightly

damped by their evident and universal despondency : his men friends have each told him in a distinctly personal, almost an insulting tone, that it is disgustingly cold ; and an elderly colonel, taking up the whole of the space in front of the fire, has just said that he considers his own drawing-room the only warm or comfortable one in the entire country. The ladies shiver on the nether side of this substantial fire-screen, and furtively rub their bare arms, which feel chilly after their cold drive.

Dinner is a success from a gastronomic point of view, and is appreciated and found to be consolatory. The conversation is agricultural and meteorological. After every one has done asking every one else how their bulbs, their apple-trees, and their herbaceous borders are doing, or are likely to do, the weather of last week or last year is discussed. And the colonel, who has a rain-gauge, contradicts the whole table upon the subject of the year's rainfall.

Agatha Lumley, whose first dinner-party this is, is, alas ! too young to be open to the consolations of a good dinner ; and after sitting in a state of nervous abstraction until the second *entrée* has come and gone, whispers to her neighbour, "I daresay that you think I am an idiot, but I'm not ; only I'm in a deuce of a fright !"

The duke has escorted in to dinner an elderly lady of a reminiscent turn of mind, who describes to him the rigours of the winters that she remembers some fifty years ago.

Mrs. Weeks's conversation even has trailed off into a series of flat smiles, with which she tries to fill up the blanks in her conversation.

Dick, at his end of the table, chatters unceasingly and

with serene enjoyment. And Anne's gentle voice is raised in talking to a gentleman whose only hearing ear is on the side farthest removed from her. The wine is excellent, and the conversation is ponderous but well maintained, after dinner is half-way through.

Some one says, "I see you are cutting down one of the trees in your drive, colonel!" And the whole company listens with absorbed interest.

Dick said to Christina the next morning, "Did you hear the colonel say that he was cutting down one of the trees in his drive? I wonder what that is for." And a gentleman who sat next her in the drawing-room after dinner remarked, "Do you know Badmington at all? He seems to be cutting down some of his trees."

Joan came down to dessert, on condition that she had had no strange dreams lately. She insisted upon reciting poetry to the assembled company; and afterwards, taking a miniature pocket-book from her sash, she announced that she was getting up a little subscription to enable her to buy a new doll's house, and that she would be glad of contributions towards that end! Anne, horrified, put her arm round the child and kissed her, and said she must certainly go off to bed. But her presence was a stimulus to questions and answers respecting her age, her tastes, and her pursuits, and her mother was entreated to allow her to remain.

Mr. Drummond was busy drawing plans of pigsties on the table-cloth for the benefit of a town-bred young lady—the newly-married wife of an African gentleman who came with the Badmingtons, and had, probably, no interest beyond shop-windows and parties—who now divided her time between trying to follow the point of

Mr. Drummond's pencil, and to catch the eye of Lady Anne when that lady should give the signal to depart.

All the ladies gave way to each other so courteously on leaving the dining-room that it seemed likely that, through stress of politeness, they might be obliged to remain there all night. Till Mrs. Weeks, being of no rank whatever, gathered up her purple skirts and gave the lead, crying, "I *never* stand on ceremony," and looked delighted with herself.

After dinner the ladies sat in the truth-telling glare of many duplex lamps, by which country drawing-rooms are lighted. They drank coffee, and warmed their chilled arms by the fire, and began to enjoy a little intimate conversation. They discussed antiquated scandal from the country vicarage point of view—the scandal which has come through "a girl in our village, who was in service in such and such a place;" and the scandal, like a muddy stream, had flowed so long and so far that it had gathered a good deal of rubbish on its journey. It was very much worse scandal than is ever heard in town, and bore no resemblance at all to facts, nor was in any way dependent upon circumstances. Mrs. Weeks, in her good-natured kindly voice, took away the characters of three distinguished personages with serene enjoyment, and she knew that what she said was *perfectly true*, "because a girl in our village was in service as kitchen-maid at Mrs. Lawson's in Park Lane, and a person like that would be sure to know." The date of the scandal was always fixed in a convenient way as having taken place the other day, and the more conscientious of the ladies prefaced their wilder statements and satisfied their principles of veracity by imposing the burden of re-

sponsibility of their tales upon a mysterious person whom they called "People." "People say this;" and "People say that." Not even "the girl in our village" seemed to be quite such a mysterious, lying spirit as "People."

The men lingered over wine and cigarettes in the dining-room, and seemed fortified thereby, and more disposed to be complacent. They smiled beneficently, looked at their watches, and decided that the horses ought not to be kept standing.

Dickie bounded to the door as soon as the first carriage was announced, and began to imitate the cries of a London linkman.

"Colonel Badmington's carriage stops the way! Forward 'ere Mr. Lumley's carriage! 'Ansom or faw-weel, sir, etc., etc., etc."

His jocularity was in striking contrast with the evening's sober dullness, and did not harmonize with it. No one responded to Dickie's mirth; and having helped his guests into their carriages in a jocular and obliging manner, he would—if he had journeyed onwards with their occupants—have heard the universal criticism, "How silly!"

"Do not go to bed yet," said Dick to his wife and Christina. "The night is young; let's go into the billiard-room, and have a hundred up before we turn in. That was a very nice party, dear," he continued, linking his arm in his wife's, as they went into the billiard-room, "and I think every one enjoyed themselves.—Shall we whisk?" he asked hospitably, holding up the cut-glass spirit decanter hospitably to the duke.

This was Dickie's usual formula when inviting any one to have some whisky. While "Shall we coff?"

although puzzling at first, was generally understood to mean, "Shall we have some coffee?"

"I liked all the people," he went on, as he chalked his billiard cue, and speaking with that large-minded charity, not to say universal admiration, which distinguished him; "but, my dear, who was that lady, all roses and giggles—the wife of the African gent, I mean, whom the Badmingtons brought with them?—What sort of man was the husband?" he inquired of the duke; "I saw you talking to him."

"Awful beast," replied Tim, with the good-humoured air with which he might have expressed more qualified approval. "He is the sort of chap who calls a dinner-*napkin* a *serviette*!"

"How hopeless!" said Dickie.

"I did not know any one ever called them that," said Lady Anne.

"Oh yes, they do," replied Dick; "shop-walkers do—the sort of person who says, 'Sign, sir,' and people who dine next you at restaurants. Anne," with one of his quick changes of conversation, "we must certainly supply Mr. Weeks with handkerchiefs when he comes to dine. How that man sniffed! He had a carbolic smoke-ball with him in his coat pocket, because I happened to see it when he took out his comforter. Mrs. Weeks meant to sing; she had a whole bundle of music with her, including 'The Tin Gee-gee.'"

"O Dickie," said Anne in consternation, "why did no one think of asking her? I am afraid she will feel a little hurt."

"I knew she had the music all the time," said Mr. Drummond, "because Joan and I were watching from

the gallery to see every one arrive, and we heard Mrs. Weeks say, 'Hide it under your coat, Willie, in case I am not asked to sing.' "

"You bad Dickie," said Anne fondly, "you shall take a note to Mrs. Weeks for your sins, and ask her to come up some afternoon and have a little music, and you shall play the accompaniment."

"No," said Dickie firmly, "I will not play Mrs. Weeks's accompaniment. She thumps time on my shoulder the whole time, and says I play too much from my elbow."

"How do you play from your elbow?" said Tim; "how is it done?"

"I don't know. Ask Mrs. Weeks. You can't play from your shoulder, because she thumps it all the time; but Mrs. Weeks is so musical, she wouldn't be content if you played from your hind legs."

"Isn't Dickie a fool?" said the duke, giving his brother-in-law a friendly push which sent him flying across the room.

"And him a marrit man too!" said Christina.

"You should have known me before I was married, Miss M'Nab," Dick said; "I think there never was such an ass as I was till Anne took me in hand!" His voice grew husky, as it always did when he spoke of his wife. He left Christina to finish the game of billiards, and crossed the room, and sat by her side, fingering her bright work, and taking her hand in his.

"Such is married life," said the duke, looking across the billiard-table, and smiling at Christina.

"I approve of married life for every one," said Christina, with intention.

"Oh, so do I, by Jove!" said the duke

CHAPTER X.

SAID Dickie, as he and Christina walked along the Much-Benham Road the following day, "John is a rattling good fellow, isn't he?"

"I like him now," said Christina, "but I did not care for him at first."

"You have not seen him at his best," said Dickie cheerily; "such a fellow for songs and stories!" Then dropping his tone of exaggerated cheerfulness, Dick said, "You do not think he is ill, do you, Miss M'Nab? I wish you would tell me the truth from an outsider's point of view."

"I do not think he is looking any worse," said Christina; "but then, of course, I have never seen him looking very well."

"Oh, that is his limp," said Dickie, relieved; "a limp gives a man an invalid look. And then, you know, he is often laid up for a winter like this. The cold weather does not seem to suit him, and yet he dislikes the idea of going abroad."

"Has he always been lame?" asked Christina. Mr. Churchill and his chronic illness, the reason for his stay at Poplar's Court (for he was no relation either of Dickie or of Anne), was one of the few subjects on which Mr. Drummond was reticent.

"No, not always," said Dickie. "He is not very lame now, you know—just drags his leg a bit. The mischief

is that he can't ride now—that's the mischief of it. And," he added, "I suppose there never was a better rider than John used to be."

Christina was loath to ask questions, and they walked on in silence for a time, making leaps across puddles, and balancing themselves on ridges of turf by the side of the road where it was drier.

"He won the Cup for his regiment three times," began Dickie again suddenly, "and all those things that I've got on my mantelpiece are his. He didn't care about having them himself, so I took them.—Did you ever meet a Miss Villiers—Bertha Villiers?" asked Dick, in his unexpected way.

"No."

"Well, then, if ever you do meet her, you will know that she is the most heartless girl that ever lived." Dick dug his stick savagely into the ground, and drew it out again with a squelching noise. "You see," clearing his throat, and looking across the fields away from Christina's face, "at one time a preacher—a man who was very high up in the English Church—got hold of John. I don't know quite how it came about—I have never asked him to tell me of it—but he used to go a lot to this man's church. Well, the long and short of it is that he got converted, or something, I don't know what you call it. But John was such a good fellow always, and didn't need any stuffy old parson interfering with him; however, at any rate, when I came back from India the thing was done—John was quite changed. I'm afraid this may not be very interesting to you," broke off Dick; "Anne and I never talk about it, even to each other."

"Please go on, if you don't mind," said Christina.

"Well, you see, John had given up everything. I don't know what the parson chap had done to him, but John seemed to think that nearly everything was wrong, or a temptation of the devil, or something. He gave up racing, and even shooting and dinners, and went to work in the East End. Well, about that time he fell in love with a girl, this very Miss Villiers; and, of course, he took it hardly, for John took everything hardly, from measles to his conversion. We thought it was all right, because the girl was such a religious sort of person herself. She went into Society a good bit, out to dinner and all that sort of thing, and generally talked to a man about his soul at dessert. She used to wear black clothes in Lent, and was very pretty, and looked like an angel. So, of course, it all seemed awfully suitable; and John proposed, and she accepted, and they were engaged. Now comes the beastly part," said Dick savagely. "John thought she would help him in everything, and, of course," softening, "he may have worked her a bit too hard. They were always going to High Church services together, and giving up things in Advent and Lent—though poor John had not much left to give up—and in the end she failed him—jibbed, or something, at East End parties and Missions to Outcasts, and Testaments read at night shelters. She liked Society, although she went into it in such a holy sort of way, and so she threw John over. I always think he went mad that day he got her letter. I was with him—but I am not going to talk about it. I *did* say, 'Go to church, or something, John; or have a drink, and pull yourself together!' And he had a drink, and said he would like to go down to Sandown

with me that afternoon. You can't think what it was like, Miss M'Nab, taking a man in that state to Sandown. And then bad luck had it that it was a steeple-chase day, and Captain Johnston, who was to have ridden St. Pancras, could not come at the last minute. So some one said to John—thinking, of course, that as he was at Sandown he had got over his very strict views, which we all regretted—some one said, 'I wish you'd take his place, Churchill. Will you ride St. Pancras?' And John said, 'Yes, I'll ride him to the devil!' He had a fall at the last jump," said Dickie briefly, "and ricked his back."

Christina had tears in her eyes when Dickie had finished, and as she believed that no one should ever be seen crying, she turned her head away, and said briefly, "That's a sad story!"

They walked on in silence till far away in the still distance they heard the sound of horses' hoof-falls on the road. "Dr. Brown, I suspect," said Dickie, without looking round. On that quiet country road, where the foot of a stranger seldom trod, the sound of every wheel or hoof could be instantly located, and the owner's name given without hesitation. Villagers sitting in their fire-lit cottages at night, with the curtains securely drawn, would say to each other without turning their heads, "There goes Miss Smith's young man; he has stayed a little later than usual to-night." Or, "Farmer Mears must have had a good day at the market, or he would have been home before now."

Dickie was right in his surmise, and presently the doctor trotted up, his horse's flanks covered with mud, and his own gaiters splashed with the clay of the road.

Mr. Drummond, always delighted to talk to any one, shook hands in his hearty way, and said, "You've still got Neptune, I see. The best old horse in the countryside."

"Yes," said the doctor, leaning from his saddle to take a look at the horse, as though it were the first time he had ever seen him—"yes, I would not change Neptune for almost any horse you could offer me," and he patted him on the shoulder. "I just stopped to tell you," the doctor continued, "that the Weekses are all down with the scarlet fever; so I wouldn't let your little girl go to the Vicarage for the present. I was just riding round your way to warn you."

"Thanks very much," said Dickie cheerfully; "I'll tell my wife." And he nodded smilingly as the doctor rode on through the mud.

"Very civil of old Brown to stop and warn us like that," he said to Christina. "I must say I have a great affection for that old chap. Nobody could have been kinder than he was when Anne was ill. You don't know, of course, how ill she was once, and"—fiercely—"I'm not going to talk about it."

He called the dogs about him, and cuffed one of them severely; and this was such an unusual proceeding with Mr. Drummond that Christina showed her surprise by opening her big gray eyes very wide indeed and staring at the whimpering dog and its master.

"I hate to think of people being ill," said Dick savagely.—"Come here, poor old fellow; I didn't mean to hurt you."

The dog accepted the apology, and began to lick his master's hand, who stroked and caressed him nearly all the way home.

It was the fashion of the Drummonds—although one of which they were quite unconscious—to call each other by name as soon as they were inside the hall doors. And this accounted for the fact, which had at first puzzled Christina, that the doors of nearly all the rooms of the house were always allowed to stand open. So that when Mr. Drummond, for instance, had rattled his stick into the umbrella-stand, and tossed his gloves on to the table, and called out, “Anne, where are you, Anne?” his wife might immediately reply, “Here, Dickie, in the drawing-room, or the morning-room,” or wherever she happened to be. Anne herself, entering more quietly, would pause for a minute on the mat, and say in her clear, soft voice, “Are you in, Dickie?”

“Here,” called Anne this afternoon, when Dick had sent her name sounding through the house, and she came into the hall to hear what he had been doing and how far he had been. For no matter how void of interest life in the country may be, there still seems to be in the minds of those who remain at home, instead of going for the afternoon’s walk, a pleasant feeling of anticipation that there will be some news when the enterprising voyagers shall return home by the lonely roads or through the empty, silent fields.

“The Weekses have got the scarlet fever,” blurted out Dick, “and Brown says Joan oughtn’t to go there for the next month at least.”

“O Dickie,” said Anne, “Joan was at tea with the Weekses yesterday, and played with them all the afternoon!”

“What business had they to ask Joan to tea?” said Mr. Drummond, with a wrathfulness which he assumed

to conceal his anxiety. "Why couldn't Joan have tea in her own nursery? Confound the Weekses!" He chattered on without ceasing, in the way he had when upset and excited, confounding all things in heaven or in earth, and jumping at once to the conclusion that Joan would get scarlet fever, and would probably die.

His excitement always made his wife more gentle and composed than usual, and although her face was very white, she took her husband by the hand with a smile, saying, "We must not let our fears run away with us. And how," with a smile, "could the Weekses know that their children were going to develop scarlet fever?"

"They are always developing something," interpolated Mr. Drummond savagely.

"Don't say anything to Joan about the illness at the Vicarage; she is full of little fancies, and might soon imagine herself to be ill, and I shall warn nurse and the servants not to go into Hoeford while the fever is there."

Joan came down to tea presently, and her father greeted her as though she were but just restored to him from the grave. It was puzzling to the child to find herself held a captive through her play-hour upon her father's knee, while he repeatedly felt her hands and brow, and asked her if she felt too hot or too cold, with a solicitude he was unable to conceal. Needless to say that before the evening was over Joan had discovered all she wanted to know about the illness at Hoeford Vicarage. The situation pleased the young lady, who was naturally of a picturesque turn of mind, and her imagination at once flew to deathbed scenes and village

funerals. Before returning to her nursery she begged a little notebook from her father (who would not that evening have refused her anything, to the half of his kingdom), and she ran upstairs with it, and knocked at the door of Christina's sitting-room.

"Dear Miss M'Nab," she said gushingly, "will you let me stay here for a little while? It's the only place I ever feel that I can be alone."

Christina complied, and went on with some work in which she was engaged; and Joan curled herself up on the sofa and began to scribble vigorously. Presently she looked up and said to Christina, "Which of all my possessions do you like best?"

Christina considered for some time, and then, to humour her small guest, remarked that perhaps Joan's doll's house was really the most fascinating of all her possessions.

"I did think of leaving that to nurse," said Joan, with her head on one side, "because nurse has been so particularly obliging about keeping that doll's house dusted, and I know she would like to go on doing it."

"What are you doing, you strange child?" said Christina.

"I am making my will," remarked Joan thoughtfully, "and really it makes one feel very generous."

"I am sure your mamma would not like you to be doing anything of the sort," said Christina. "Come and sit on my knee, and I will tell you a nice little story."

Children always made Christina feel a little shy, but her serious way of treating them made her wonderfully popular with little people. To the Scotch girl, who had

been brought up with Calvinistic strictness, and without even a mother's love to counteract this grim influence, the diminutives applied to children and to dogs were quite beyond her powers to acquire. She drew little Joan Drummond on to her knee now, and began seriously, "There was once a little girl," but was interrupted by the child, who exclaimed in her polite, gushing, English way,—

"It's *too* sweet of you, you darling thing, to offer to tell me tales; but I really think I must get this finished first, and there is only twenty minutes before nurse comes to fetch me to bed. You see, if I get the Weekses' scarlet fever and die, I should like to leave all my friends something, and, of course, one would like it to be something suitable, and that is what takes the time thinking about. Please do let me go on with it now, Miss M'Nab, or else I shall think about it all night, and then I shan't sleep, or if I do I shall have queer dreams, and father has strictly forbidden dreams."

She sucked her lead pencil, and bent her little fair head with its bobbing tow-coloured curls over her task, and Christina went and sat on the sofa beside her, put her arm round her waist in an unaccustomed caress, and said, "I wish you wouldn't be so silly."

"Men are my great difficulties," said Joan, "because I seem to have so few things that men would like. Still, one would like to remember everybody; so please don't choose anything hard, Miss M'Nab, because I think men always like hard things; and if you choose any of them, my possessions would not go round, you understand? You could have my little Indian shawl, if you like—that's soft; but anything like books or my battledores

and shuttlecocks I should like to leave to gentlemen." She spread out her notebook in front of her, and wrote in a large text hand: "To father, my locket. To nurse, my doll's house."—"I should like the Weekses to have something too," she said cheerfully; "but, of course, I don't know which of them will get well and which won't. I wonder if they will cut off all my hair? I should like that, I think."

"Joan," said Christina, "please give over, there's a good child."

Further remonstrance was not required, for at this moment the nurse tapped at the door, and Joan had just time to fly across the room and deposit her will in a drawer of Christina's writing-table when she was summoned to bed.

Mr. Drummond felt, as he expressed it, "horribly jumpy" for the next two days, and he walked more often and farther than usual, begging Christina to go with him, and chatting to her rapidly during the whole of the walks. Anne stayed at home a good deal on these two days—outwardly calm and sweet, as she ever was, but often looking apprehensively at her one little girl.

On the third day Joan sickened for the fever, and was very ill indeed. Her constitution, never very strong, gave way rapidly under the disease, and her poor little body, tormented with the cruel fever, became piteously thin and worn. And then there came a terrible time for the little party at Poplar's Court, when day after day passed, and little hope was entertained for the child's recovery. Anne was not visible at all in those days. And John Churchill, although in worse health

than usual, left his rooms, and seemed to pass the greater part of his time limping up and down the corridor near the nursery, where Anne Drummond sat with her child. Dick had assumed an overdone cheerfulness, which he called "keeping up for Anne's sake," and his laugh, without a trace of mirth in it, could be heard nearly all day.

Poor little Joan, unconscious of anything around her, lay in her little bed, and talked at random of her childish games, her lessons, and her friends, or asked piteously, as the hot fever burnt through her, for water—and still again for a little water! The dear little bobbing curls had been all cut off, and the tiny wasted hands plucked uneasily at the sheets.

A young kitchenmaid who took the fever died in the house; and Anne, who loved her servants as they loved her, spared a little time from her own anxious watching to go and comfort the servant's parents. The funeral of the young girl moving across the park one day in the spring sunshine deepened the present sadness of the household and added to their fears.

The Drummonds had long ago suggested that Christina should go away when first the fever broke out; but she found that Dick—always every one's special attention—was lost without some one to speak to, and that she could at least be of service in taking him for his league-long walks, which were the poor little man's only distraction. Once, as they sat in the big, dim hall, softly lit now by the light of spring's lengthening days, Anne came downstairs and said to Christina, "She is more than usually restless this afternoon, and seems to think she has left something in your room, Miss M'Nab,

which she cannot find. Are there any toys of hers there? Do help us," she said, clasping her hands; "the doctor thinks that if we could satisfy her upon this point she would be calmer."

"I'll look everywhere," said Christina, running upstairs, "but I do not think she ever left anything there." Then she suddenly bethought herself of the little pocket-book and of Joan's "Will," and brought it down to Anne in the hall.

Poor Lady Anne! She had not given way before, but the pencilled entries which Joan had made, bestowing her childish possessions upon her friends, broke down her barrier of self-control, and she gave way to a torrent of tears which no one could check. Christina withdrew, leaving husband and wife together, and crept upstairs to the nursery.

"Here is your will," she said softly to Joan, giving the little pocket-book into the child's feverish hands. And some unknown difficulty in the child's wandering mind seemed to be satisfied. She slipped her hand into Christina's and slept peacefully.

The next day there was a great change for the better, and Anne, in the fullness of her heart, seemed to want to kiss Christina's very feet. The sudden quiet and calmness of the little patient, her refreshing sleep, and the rapid change for the better, dated from Christina's visit to the nursery; and Anne, usually so undemonstrative, had another long cry upon Christina's shoulder, which upset both women very much, and drew them together in quite an inexplicable way. Anxiety was not yet quite over, and the chairs on either side of

Joan's bed were occupied by the mother and the nurse when Christina looked in in the afternoon to see the child.

"I think she is asleep," whispered Anne, "which, of course, is the best thing for her. The difficulty now is to get her to take any nourishment. The doctor says that if she could be induced to take something her convalescence would be assured."

"Please sit down, Christina," said Joan's feeble voice from the bed. "I like to see your hair shining; it looks like a lamp."

Christina took Anne's vacant chair by the bed, and then Joan's own nurse came in with a little cup of milk in her hand. The poor woman had sat up for many days and nights with her charge, refusing even to leave her post when the professional nurse was on duty. Her affection for the little, sallow, fair-haired girl was touching in its intensity; but she had a foolish way of talking, which irritated Joan in her present feeble state.

"Now, ducksie," said the nurse, "do try a teeny, weeny droppie."

And the sick nurse from the other side added her coaxings, saying, "Nursie will be so pleased if the wee girlie will just try and swallow a little."

Joan rolled her head round on the pillow, and fixed her eyes on Christina's golden hair, which she said looked like a lamp. "I want something to eat," she said briefly.

"Here, my petsie," said her nurse—"here is your beautiful milk, which Nannie has brought to you; or would you like a little barley-water better?"

“Blooming fool!” said Joan weakly. “I do not call milk or barley-water something to eat. I call ‘something to eat’ beef or mutton.”

And then, as Dickie said, a child who called her nurse a “blooming fool” could not die yet; she was not fit to die.

CHAPTER XI.

DICKIE's next trouble was that "Christina was not getting enough for her money!" A *bonâ-fide* cheque had come from Christina's *bonâ-fide* lawyers in payment of her first quarter as "paying guest," and the cheque weighed like lead upon Richard Drummond's soul.

"There was that jolly time we had after Christmas," he said to his wife, "and, of course, the Weekses are pleasant neighbours, and the Lumleys and some other people have asked her to dinner; but hang me if I know what she is actually paying for in this house! John is sick—at least he is not quite so well as usual, poor old chap; and then there was Joan's illness, when Miss M'Nab behaved like a brick—I always said she was a brick—but it will be fearfully dull for her the next little while." Even Mrs. Weeks had admitted that it was dull in the country in Lent! "And if you and Joan go to Bournemouth for change of air, I do not quite see what is going to happen."

Miss M'Nab, however, was a young woman who, as she herself expressed it, "gae'd her ain gait," and was never difficult to dispose of, so her host might have spared himself his anxiety concerning her movements. For two whole afternoons he walked beside Miss M'Nab along the roads, where hedges now began to bud, feeling wretched, and trying in vain to relieve his mind by an explanation and a proposition which he intended making

to the paying guest. Fortunately, it was quite immaterial to Christina whether she talked or remained silent. Silence was never fraught with a feeling of weakness in Christina's case, but her host's preoccupation was unusual, and she wondered what was coming: that whatever was in Mr. Drummond's mind would most assuredly come to the surface before long was a thing that no one who knew him ever doubted for an instant.

"What I say is," began Dick, using his favourite formula, and referring evidently to some former conversation which no one could remember ever having taken place—"what I say is, if satisfaction is not given, half the money should be returned. Why, even a beast of a tradesman says that; and I never could see myself why if you are a trader you shouldn't trade in a gentlemanlike way! That's logic, I think."

He rambled on upon this and various subjects before it ever occurred to Christina that there was any personal application of his remarks, until he suddenly exclaimed, "You won't mind if I send back the cheque to your lawyers, will you? It is not good business—well, not to put too fine a point on it—you know the place ain't worth the money."

"Mr. Drummond," said Christina, startled out of her usual calm, and laying her hand on Dickie's arm, "you have not, I trust, said a word of this to Mr. M'Crae?"

"No, no; why should I?" responded Dick. "I have not said a word to the lawyers yet."

"Then please forbear," said Christina.

"I am very sorry," said Dickie apologetically; "I only meant to say it was so beastly dull for you here,

now that John is ill, and we cannot ask people to stay or anything. What I thought——”

“You’ll oblige me,” said Christina, “by refraining from any such remarks.”

“I don’t quite see why.”

“I won’t deceive you,” said Christina, blushing. “The advantages I get here are more than I can pay for, and I have got such a lot of money that I do not know what to do with it. But besides that” (Christina’s truthfulness was of the unsparing order of things), “this friend of mine, Mr. M’Crae, is a very proud and conceited young man, and wants to be above me in all things. Now, I have been representing to him the aristocratic circles in which I move and the grand times we have been having, and if there is illness or anything in the house I just don’t write for a week or two. A more bumptious young man than Mr. M’Crae does not exist; and you’ll oblige me by not mentioning that you consider anything dull down here.”

Mr. Drummond murmured that the affair might be managed quietly, through Christina’s lawyers. But she, having first remarked that there were very few people you could trust, seemed so distressed at the thought of what she called “any carried tales” reaching Mr. M’Crae’s ear that the subject was closed.

“You need not bother about me,” said Christina, “when Lady Anne goes away for a change, because I have had a very polite invitation from the Duchess of Southwark asking me to go and stay with her at Timworth Castle. And later,” added Christina darkly, “I may be obliged to take a house in London for the season. It depends how things go at Timworth.”

But Dickie was not listening. "Timworth Castle," he said; "why, that is worse than us! They shut up half the house, and the duchess is so mean that she counts the candles and looks after the blacking-pots. You will like the philosopher: you know, of course, that Trottie—we always call her Trottie—married again. But I really cannot see what you will do with yourself at Timworth." For the country gentleman, no matter how dull his own domicile may be, always compares it favourably with those of his neighbours.

Christina went alone to Timworth Castle, because Jessie had gone to stay with her sister in Scotland; and as she could hardly be called, even in a favourable advertisement, a "useful maid," her mistress did not think she would miss her services much. It was sufficiently important to the bourgeois-born girl to be met at Timworth station by a big footman with a cockade in his hat, who asked her if she had any luggage, while a very sumptuous-looking carriage waited for her in the road.

Here was another instance of aristocratic poverty, and Christina marvelled. Almost every one whom she had met in England had declared that they were very hard up; but this did not prevent their having stables full of horses, and keeping up costly establishments. Purses were empty, but bills were paid somehow; and though one never seemed to see a fat roll of notes, such as a Lumboro' merchant would produce from his pocket-book with as little concern as another man would produce his pocket-handkerchief, yet dressmakers' bills were enormous, unnecessary servants abounded, and

every one ordered, as a matter of course, the fashionable fad, were it electric lights or chiffon ruffles. "Poor!" ejaculated Christina, settling herself under the fur rug of the luxurious carriage, and placing a morocco-covered cushion with a ducal coronet upon it at her back; "there is many might wish they had half their complaint." She nerved herself for the moment of arrival at the doors of the big gray castle, which she could see between the trees as the carriage turned in at the lodge gates, and longed for the assurance of Lilah Anstruther or Judith Campbell, who could enter a hall full of people as indifferently as they would enter a ready-money shop.

The trees had burst into April buds all along the drive, and pale primroses were showing beneath hedges, powdered with green. The lengthening day was full of delightful peace, and the old castle looked dignified, secure, magnificent against its background of misty, budding elms. "It would take every penny of eighteen thousand a year to keep it up properly," said Christina to herself, with a thrill of rapture, as she thought how few rivals there could be to such a large fortune as her own. Why, only a few pale lights were lit in one wing of the grand old pile! With eighteen thousand a year (and Christina) there might be a blaze of light in every window!

A fatherly butler relieved Christina of her bag, and said he thought her Grace was in the garden. And the next moment Christina saw a little figure in a very short dress running with great activity across the wet lawn, followed by a number of bounding dogs. As they approached near to the house the fatherly butler said, "There is her Grace." And immediately after the

Duchess of Southwark took a flying leap over the flower-bed and landed at Christina's side. She extended her hand, in a very old and dirty gardening-glove, to her guest, and smiled at her with a sidelong glance, and a curious twist of the neck which gave the impression that Her Grace's smile was somehow connected with the muscles of the thorax.

"Do come in, won't you?" she said.—"Thank you, thank you," to her servants, "thank you very much!"

This gracious lady bestowed thanks wherever she went, and when doors were opened or shut for her; so her progress about the house or when entering a carriage was generally a chorus of thanks.

"This way. The hall is very dark; but we can find our way into the morning-room, and get tea.—Put the table here, please, Thomas; thank you, and the cake—so many thanks."

She threw off her jacket with surprising energy, and made a sudden onslaught upon the dogs who had followed her into the room. She addressed them as her "sweetest" and "tweetest," and caressed their heads with murmurs of affection. Then, in a flash, this active lady seated herself on the sofa by Christina's side, and without addressing her bent down to the collie who was sitting heavily on her dress, and said, "Say, 'How do you do, Miss M'Nab?' say, 'How do you do, Miss M'Nab?' say it, my Tweetums!"

Christina found herself almost expecting an audible greeting from the animal, and stooped down, and gravely extended a small gloved hand.

The duchess kissed the collie's nose, and said, "He

says he hopes you had a comfy journey, and are not very tired."

"No, thank you!" said Christina, dividing her answer between the dog and its mistress; "and I had a pleasant journey, though without incident of any sort."

"Mimsey will be here directly," said the duchess; "I cannot think where he has gone this afternoon."

"Is he a collie too?" asked Christina.

"No," said the duchess; "I only wish he were. No, Mimsey is my husband. I daresay Tim told you that I married again—a professor—quite nice, but stupid. Have a little more tea; I am afraid there is no more bread-and-butter."

Christina accepted the offer of a renewal of her cup, and obtained from her hostess a modicum of tea and a good deal of tepid water. Feeling hungry after her journey, she summoned courage to ask for a piece of cake; and the duchess slapped her playfully on the knee, and said, "You naughty child! that is my doggie's cake. However, you shall have a little bit, if my Tweetums will allow it.—Is the naughty lady to have some of its own cake?" she asked her canine friend, whose reply must have been favourable, for a tiny piece of cake was handed to Christina with the remark that that was every bit she was to have. Subsequently she asked if Miss M'Nab would like to see her bedroom. Christina discovered, after paying other visits, that a guest's chief attraction in the eyes of a hostess consists in keeping as much out of the way as possible.

A charming housemaid, with an affectionately respectful manner, unpacked Christina's boxes, laid out her dinner dress, asked if she might remove the lady's

boots, and left the room with the information that dinner was at eight o'clock. "And it is only five o'clock now," said Christina, feeling hungry. She found some writing-paper with the ducal coronet upon it, and wrote to Colin, and then dressed and went downstairs.

The hall through which she passed was still dimly lighted, and the drawing-room looked vast and empty. A few comfortable chairs were drawn up to a large fire, and each of these was occupied by a dog. A mastiff lay on the hearthrug, and Christina found that he growlingly resented a stranger's claim even to a corner of it; so she remained in the cold outer circle, beyond the warmth of the fire. There were some large pictures in heavy frames hanging on the walls, and a great many sofas and chairs in chintz covers were scattered about the room. A small table with a photograph of the Queen, signed "Victoria," stood near the fire; and some larger pieces of furniture—cabinets and the like—were arranged without much taste round the walls of the room. A large mirror at the farther end of the room displayed Christina to herself in all the bravery of a new evening toilet, and she contemplated it with grave satisfaction. None of the girls whom she had seen had her beauty, and none of them were possessed of even half so large a fortune. "I stand a good chance," said Christina to herself, but she wished some one would tell her whether or not the duke was expected to come and stay in the house.

The professor came in presently, and saluted her in a very kindly and courteous manner. He was a big man with a fine head, such as in novels is called "leonine," covered with very thick gray hair in curls. He had a

fine large frame, and a vigorous, healthy look. Mr. Prendergast was a professor of philosophy in — University; a man of great learning, and much beloved by his disciples, whose text-book was his famous work upon the “Necessity of Death.” He had married the Duchess of Southwark in the fifth year of her widowhood, and the incongruous match, so utterly irreconcilable in the opinion of his friends, had been a perfectly happy one. He and the duchess rented Timworth Castle from the young duke, all of whose property was let. The place was much too large for them, but it was within convenient distance of the university town, and the duchess believed that her principles of economy were the one thing which rendered it possible for them to live upon the family estate. Maximilian Prendergast, or “the Philosopher” as he was called by his students, who believed that only he had the key of life, inspired a great deal of affection, and was very little aware of the fact.

“We are very pleased to see you here,” he said; “and though I fear the house has not many attractions for young people, the duchess and I will try to make your visit a pleasant one.”

Christina thanked him; and then they heard the duchess flying across the hall, and all the dogs rose and barked loudly, while she kissed each in turn, and said how glad they were to see their own missus. The professor offered his arm to Christina in a ceremonious manner when dinner was announced, and this alarmed her very much, and she wished she might say, “Please take her Grace in, and let me follow behind.” Her Grace, however, was busy blowing out all the candles

in the drawing-room, and followed them with dancing steps into the dining-room. This room was a very large and noble one, and was hung with tapestry, and boasted an Adam ceiling.

The fatherly butler and three very tall footmen in gray liveries and yellow collars waited at table. It had always seemed to Christina's bourgeois mind the height of impertinence, not to say greediness, to look at a *menu* before beginning dinner. "To take what was provided" was an axiom of her childhood, but to require to be told what was coming surely showed an undue regard for the pleasures of the table. To-night, however, her hunger, and its attendant anxieties as to the viands, overcame her good manners, and she glanced in a surreptitious manner at the porcelain tablet in front of her. The results of her perusal were reassuring, and if the dogs were not given the whole of the dinner, Christina's healthy appetite would be abundantly satisfied. A spoonful of clear soup served in silver plates was not substantial, nor did a single smelt do more than whet the appetite. A morsel of mince-meat on a piece of toast followed next, and was called a *croûton*. An almost impalpable helping of game was next handed to Christina; and one stuffed olive concluded the repast, which the young lady pronounced in her own mind to be "scrimpit."

After dinner the duchess played Patience, and chatted with her dogs, and that was all that Christina could ever remember afterwards of the evening. Her hunger, after luncheon of a few sandwiches in the train, was so sharp that she could give nothing else, save her own feeling of discomfort, any attention at all. And Mr. Prender

gast's simplest remarks might have been full of wisdom, courtesy, or kindness; Christina never could remember afterwards what they were. The duchess remarked upon saying good-night that she looked a little pale, and Christina had almost said, "No wonder!" but recollected herself in time, and merely remarked without much brilliancy, "Do I?" Some glasses of cold water were placed upon a tray in the hall, for the delectation of those who enjoyed this form of refreshment before going to bed, and Christina drank a glass of it, gravely remarking to herself, with a certain dry humour which never forsook her, "I hope there are a few substantial microbes in this!"

Prayers preceded breakfast the next morning, and were held in a very beautiful library with an organ in it. The active duchess sprang upon the music bench and played a voluntary, with her feet scampering up and down the pedals all the time. Then the servants trooped in, and the professor—grave, handsome, magnificent—took his place by a reading-desk with a Bible upon it.

"Mimsey," called out the duchess suddenly, swinging herself round on the polished seat of the organ, "you are going to read the fifth chapter of Ephesians?"

"I am, my love," said the professor.

"Then don't!" The duchess beckoned to Christina, who sat near her, and bending forward said in a quick, audible whisper, "It's the chapter about wives being in subjection to their husbands. Some women always pretend they want a master—an effete piece of Orientalism like that! But I always know by instinct when Mimsey is going to read that chapter, and then I stop him."

She smiled with a twist of her neck ; and the professor meanwhile, having sought out another chapter, began to read it in his sonorous, big, delightful voice.

Breakfast was so poor a meal that Christina believed she arose from it more hungry than when she sat down. Delicate wafers called "breakfast biscuits" and scraps of buttered toast might be dainty fare, but on an invigorating spring morning could hardly be called substantial. "If I were a weak-minded woman I should cry," said Christina ; but instead of that she laced on her boots, and announced her intention of walking to the village. "If there's food to be had within three miles of me," she said to herself with determination, "then food I shall have."

The village, however, proved to be almost at the park gates, and contained a little baker's shop, into the window of which a rosy-cheeked baker's wife was at that very moment placing a big tin tray filled with hot, shining brown buns ! Christina's heart leaped. No loafer looking at a cook-shop's window, and coveting the sausages that frizzle there, ever felt more anxious for food. "I'll buy six buns," she said to herself, "and eat them as I go along the road." And at that very moment the professor came round the corner of the baker's shop, and said, "Ah, you're early astir, I see ! Are you taking a walk ?" Christina assented, and politeness made her hope that the professor had not guessed her intentions respecting the buns.

"I am delighted to see that you can take the air so early," he said cordially.

And inwardly Christina groaned, "There seems little else but air that I can take."

"May I accompany you if you are going a little farther?" said her host.

Christina's heart sank again as she went forwards on her journey. "My very knees are weak," she cried to herself at the end of a mile or so of brisk walking. "As we go back I must really purchase a bun, whether he thinks it eccentric conduct or not, or I shall certainly faint by the way."

The country lane wound round by various twists and turns, and landed them at the hall door of Timworth Castle at twelve o'clock.

"Do you mind telling me what time is lunch?" asked Christina faintly, as she sat down on one of the big stone benches outside the door in the pleasant April sunshine.

"It is at one o'clock," said the professor. "Do you mind having it so early?"

"No," said Christina, "not at all. In fact, it cannot be too early for me."

The duchess came flying out of the house with a merry step. "Will you jump?" she said to Christina, and handed her a skipping-rope; then unwound her own, and began jumping briskly as children do—turning the rope in a circle over her head, and jumping deftly over it with a pattering sound of her small feet. Christina obediently stood up and did likewise; and both ladies jumped for some minutes, the professor meanwhile returning to his library and his books.

"There!" said the duchess, flinging away her rope at last; "now I am going for a run with my dogs."

But at this moment a carriage was seen turning in at the distant lodge gates and driving up the avenue.

"My dear, who can these be at this unearthly hour?" said the duchess. "Heaven send that they do not stay to lunch!" Then as the carriage drew nearer, "Good gracious! I do believe they are the Rumfords, and that I asked them to lunch. It's all right. We'll manage somehow; but don't take any of the chicken *pâté*."

She then went forward and received her guests graciously, expressing pleasure in their arrival, and inviting them to go for a run with the dogs before luncheon. Lady Rumford had brought her daughters with her, and Christina found that she was, by tacit consent, expected to walk with these young ladies round the gardens, and show them such interesting objects as sprouting vegetables and hot greenhouses. When the luncheon-gong sounded she bent faint steps towards the house, and the Miss Rumfords thought her sadly inattentive to the duties of conversation.

The chicken *pâté* was passed round, with the assistance of the four menservants, and Christina heroically said, "No, thank you," when it was offered to her. Subsequently the duchess, who had her eye upon the sideboard, remarked to her butler, "If there is a little bit left, hand it to Miss M'Nab." And Christina, pride being absolutely swallowed up and overcome by hunger, meekly and thankfully took what remained in the large, solid silver dish. Four lamb cutlets and five little quenelles were then placed in magnificent silver receptacles in front of her Grace, who, on economical principles, always helped the luncheon dishes herself. Lady Rumford accepted a cutlet, and the two Miss Rumfords each had a quenelle. Miss M'Nab accepted

a portion of the former dish, and Mr. Prendergast was then asked what he would take.

"Thank you," he said, looking first round the right-hand side of a bowl of flowers in the middle of the table at the quenelles, and then bending his head, and sending another glance round the left-hand side at the two remaining cutlets—"thank you, my love, I think I will have a quenelle."

"You will take a cutlet," said the duchess, without a moment's hesitation.

To which he replied, "Thank you, well, I think I *should* like a cutlet."

Christina did not discover, until she had been at Timworth Castle for some days, that Mr. Prendergast's choice of viands was always subject to his wife's approval or disapproval, and the same formula was repeated every day at lunch.

When the sweets were placed upon the table, Mr. Prendergast had hardly said, "A little rice-pudding, please," before his spouse was upon him with a bounce, as it were, and with startling rapidity remarked, "You will take apple-tart, Mimsey!" And Mimsey, undisturbed, said, "Thank you, my dear, I think I *should* like a little apple-tart."

The tart in question was the smallest that Christina had ever seen. It reminded her of the little pies that she used to make for her dolls when she was a little girl. She ate a piece of bread that was placed beside her plate, and asked for another bit, and ate that too.

After luncheon there was a long drive in an open carriage, and to restore circulation, when they returned to the castle, the duchess proposed a race down the

avenue with the dogs. A frugal dinner being ended, the party again separated for the night, and a very wan and white Christina, looking at her image in the mirror at night, said to herself, "If there is no word of the duke coming to-morrow, I leave this house, as sure as my name is Christina M'Nab."

CHAPTER XII.

“WHEN is Tim coming?” said the philosopher the next day at breakfast as he cracked a small egg. Even the eggs at Timworth were unusually small.

“I think he comes to-morrow, with the rest of the people who are coming,” said the duchess.

And Christina ate a piece of the brittle toast, and thought she would try to hold out a little longer. If only the *menus* at Timworth Castle were not so exasperating! They were written in French, and were lengthy and full of appetizing suggestions of things to come. They were varied, whereas the food hardly ever varied. Christina sometimes wondered where the original cold meat came from which furnished so many *réchauffés*. It is true that upon one night in the week the fine mince would be called a “quenelle,” while on another night it would take the title of a “ragoût,” or a “croûton,” a “rissole,” or a “salmi.” The title was distinctive, but the flavour was the same. “If they would only call it mince,” sighed Christina, “one would not get so many disappointments.” The duchess herself seemed able to make a hearty meal off a green pea and a water biscuit, and hardly had the taste for anything so solid as mince.

“I think,” she remarked one day, turning over a few of the little particles with her fork—“I think this mutton is a little tough.”

"This mutton was always a little tough," said the philosopher, referring to it as to an old friend.

"You dear old stupid, you care for nothing but food!" said his lady.

She invited Christina to come up to her room, and offered her a pair of dumb-bells; then showed her her Indian clubs, her chest-expanders, and various contrivances invented by Mr. Sandow for the muscular development of the human race. Christina obediently tried them all in turn, and as it was a wet day the duchess announced that she was going to spend her afternoon sliding in the ballroom. It was evidently expected that her guest should do the same, and they each took one side of the vast room, the duchess flying from end to end of it with bounding steps, and long successful slides, while Christina gravely took short rushes on the newly-polished boards, and slid carefully with her left foot foremost.

"What next?" thought Christina. "Surely even English people must set some limit to their foolishness!"

Either the long wet day, or the unusual exercise of sliding up and down a ballroom, made Christina M'Nab more than commonly hungry when she went to bed that night. "I feel quite sick," she said to herself, "and I think I am beginning to lose my looks." She did not immediately begin to undress, but sat wondering if there was any possible way by which she could obtain refreshment before she slept that night. Might a friendly housemaid be asked for some bread and butter? or might not this unusual proceeding come to the ears of her Grace, and find disfavour in her sight?

Want, however, conquered her timidity, and she gently and furtively rang the bell ; but the summons was not answered, and Christina had not the courage to ring again. Suddenly it struck her that a large silver biscuit-box—presumably containing biscuits—always stood on the dining-room sideboard. She had never seen it removed from its place. And goaded by her voracity she determined to steal downstairs and get a few of the coveted biscuits from the silver box. It was now after eleven o'clock, and she wondered whether the great dim hall would be quite dark ; but on opening her door found that the passage outside was flooded with moonlight, and that, therefore, she would be able to see her way by the beams which streamed from the uncurtained windows downstairs. Her door creaked horribly as she opened it and crept forth in her long lace peignoir held softly about her. In all the novels that she had read, the young lady who leaves her room at midnight to seek a forgotten novel in the library meets with some strange adventure, and the interest of the reader increases thereupon with leaps and bounds, while one asks half-fearfully what is coming next ! But the great house in which she found herself sheltered no hero of romance, and surely the object of her midnight journey was sufficient to proclaim its respectability. Cautiously she moved downstairs, her bare feet hardly sounding on the carpet's velvet pile, and without candle or taper in her hand she flitted like a white moonbeam from pillar to pillar of the dark hall. Great patches of the moon's soft light lay on the oak floor, and outside she could see the trees, and lawns, and park looking like some mystical scene in a fairy story, in which perhaps

some one has turned the world into silver. Suddenly she paused, gathered the white laces of her wrapper about her, and listened—did more than listen—threw back her shining golden head, and sniffed. Christina's steps were arrested not by a sound but by a smell—a distinct succulent odour of cooked viands that whetted her keen appetite afresh, and made her mouth water. Again she threw back her head, and sniffed long and keenly, and her nose proclaimed that mutton cutlets at least, not to mention tomato sauce, were in her immediate vicinity. Doubtless the servants were having a late supper. Could she possibly suggest that she should share it with them? Could she utter a scream which would summon them to her assistance, and then, on the plea that she had walked in her sleep, suggest that cutlets would do much to restore her nerves? Would it be allowable, in the house of a friend, simply to call the cook or butler, and put the case plainly before him or her that she was literally starving? She softly pushed open the green baize door that led to the kitchen wing, and sniffed again. The odour seemed less strong here than it did at the door of the library. She shut it again in fear, wondering if by any chance she should be discovered at this time of night wandering throughout the house, what would her hostess think of her? She wafted back to the hall again, and slipped from pillar to pillar in the patches of moonlight that lay on the floor. How still and ghostly it was to wander about a strange house at twelve o'clock at night! The odour was now distractingly impregnated with roast lamb—early lamb, brown and crisp on the outside, and most temptingly tender within! Oh for one good

square, hearty meal ! A door banged, and like a flash of light Christina darted to the shelter of a tall screen and hid behind it. She thought she heard steps, and when, as she listened, these died away there was no more courage left in her. If biscuits could be secured, she would give up all hope of penetrating farther into the region of delightful smell, and content herself with her one simple robbery. She slipped into the dining-room, and snatched the three remaining biscuits that she found in the silver biscuit-box, and flying softly across the hall sped upwards to her room. At the top of the staircase she came face to face with the duchess. The two women stopped and stared at each other in the moonlight, utterly incapable—though from entirely different motives—of uttering a sound.

“Are you,” said the duchess at last, in a hollow voice, while her meagre little frame shook, and her eyes grew huge and round under the wrinkled brows and faded hair—“are you from the nether world, and why do you haunt this house ? ”

Christina, perceiving that she was mistaken for a ghost, felt slightly affronted by the idea, as many of us would. To be relegated to the nether world, or any other world except the one we know, before our time, is irritating even to the bluntest susceptibilities.

“No,” said Christina, “it’s—it’s just me ! I have been downstairs, because”—there was nothing for it but to tell the truth—“I thought I could fancy a dry biscuit.”

The duchess wiped damp beads from her brow, and her old active, spirited manner at once returned. “Good gracious ! what were you doing that for, eh, eh ? ”

Christina hesitated ; the situation was fraught with

difficulties on all sides. How should she escape from the pitfalls that surrounded her? "A dry biscuit is—is such company at night," she faltered.

"Don't get fat, my dear child," said the duchess; "you will lose all your beauty. Dear me! what a fright you have given me! However, it is as good as a five-mile walk, for it takes such a lot out of one. I thought I heard a door bang, and came to see what was the matter. Mimsey is such a coward that I always have to do watchman. Good-night. I am glad you ain't a ghost."

The little nightgowned figure went flying down the passage, and her Grace disappeared into her room as though shot from a bow. Christina returned more slowly to her own apartment, ate her three dry biscuits, and drank some water out of the tooth glass. "Even the water is filtered, and has the substance taken out of it!" she thought.

When the duke arrived at Timworth the next afternoon there was no further spirit left in Christina, and she was incapable of even the driest and most business-like flirtation. They met in the long avenue, where the duchess had outstripped her guest in a mad race with the dogs, and Tim jumped down from the dog-cart in which he was driving from the station, and greeted her with his usual delightful, happy "Ha ah ya?" and Christina said simply, and without premeditation, "O Tim, I am so hungry!"

"Hungry! You poor child, you don't mean to say I never told you? What a beast I am! Did not the philosopher say anything? Of course some one ought to have explained. And you have been simply starving!"

They strolled up to the house together, and the duke, unable to forgive himself, went on : " You know it is my mother's pet weakness to try and retrieve the family fortunes by subjecting us all to a slow form of starvation. I think she calls it ' keeping the weekly bills down.' But we all understand her, you know, and there is always supper in the library after ten o'clock, when she goes to bed. How cruel of my stepfather not to invite you ! But no doubt he thought your maid took things to your room. Have you been living on mince-meat ? "

" Yes," said Christina ; " and there was whiles when I could have eaten more of it."

" Poor child ! You see we all give in to this harmless weakness of my mother's—except when there is a large party staying in the house, and then the philosopher pretends that that is his special affair, and that he pays for it out of some mysterious fund, the source of which has never transpired. What can I get you now ? Shall we go to the housekeeper's room and have a big tea ? She was my nurse when I was a little chap, and has always supplied supplementary meals."

" There were such delicious-looking buns in the village bakery," said Christina ; " I have thought about them since the first morning I saw them, but I have never had an opportunity of buying one. Your mamma is very active, and you never quite know when she will be round the corner."

Tim laughed ; and they walked across the park where the trees were budding and the rooks cawing, and primroses looked up from the wet brown earth,

with something of the happy confidence of children who know not why they are beloved. They went out at a side gate together to the village, and had tea in the baker's little back-parlour. Some rosy children peeped shyly at them through the open door. There were pots of flowering geraniums upon the window ledge, and snowy curtains, and polished chairs, upon which the fire light winked delightfully. His Grace, who had made a capital luncheon at two o'clock that very day, ate three buns, remarking that "this was ripping." And in his daily letter to "the girl to whom he was not engaged," he remarked that Christina M'Nab was the best comrade he had ever known.

"I suppose you know all the crowd who are coming to-morrow?" he said as they wended their way home again with that inward sense of satisfaction which a bun produces. No one ever *could* remember that Christina knew no one. "You know Hardcastle; he was at the Drummonds, I think." And the Tollemaches—those pale girls who never say anything. And the Bathursts—did Christina know them? The Whites, too—frantic people, but the duchess loved them. Major White was a little mild man with a squeaky voice, who drank tepid water with a dash of glycerine in it, and invented torpedoes for the destruction of nations! "You will like Granston, I think," said Tim; "he is a great pal of mine—an excellent boating chap, and has rowed three winning races of the 'Varsity Boat Race."

He ran over a list of names unknown to Christina, with the usual explanatory label attached to each; and Christina said,—

"You know, in Society a catalogue of the exhibits

would be quite superfluous," which made the duke laugh ; and he said,—

"I suppose we all act as showman to each other, don't we ? Why is it, I wonder ? I suppose it is the fashion to be unreserved and gossiping ; and by-and-by we shall see in newspapers and journals not only that we were walking in the Park, or shopping in Bond Street, but what we think about in the middle of the night."

"Gossip is very delightful, I think," said Christina. "When I know people, I like to know everything about them—not only the little corner of themselves that they reveal to you in general conversation."

"*Homo sum ; nihil humani*," began the duke. "I once had to write out that quotation a hundred times, and it is the only bit of Latin I ever remember."

"A legislator like yourself," said Christina, relapsing into her judicial manner, "should be better educated."

It tickled his Grace's fancy to hear himself addressed as a legislator, and he remarked that he did not think the affairs of England would be immeasurably improved by his attentions.

"Tell me something more about our friends," said Christina presently. "Have you been meeting any one who stayed at Poplar's Court ?"

"Barny's girl still seems to be obdurate," he remarked genially. "I met her in town the other day ; she is as handsome as paint."

"What way does she not have him ?" asked Christina.

"Goodness knows !" said Tim. He had a happy habit, this red-haired boy, of smiling as he talked, which gave everything he said a certain charming

geniality which atoned for the lack of brilliance in his conversation. And whether describing his own poverty or the hardness of Barny's girl, the smile was still the same, and very white teeth showing between beardless lips lit up the commonplace ruddy face, and transformed it into something that was altogether likeable and fresh and young. As they approached the house he exclaimed, "Why, there is Barny!—Hullo, Barnabas! Have you dropped like the gentle rain from heaven upon the earth beneath?"

"I have not come quite so far," answered Lord Hardcastle, "nor," he added, "from such a good place. I have been staying near here with my aunt, who tells me I am getting scraggy and old, and that my hair is growing thin. Why are relations so personal? She gave me three bottles of hair-oil; and my man tells me they are excellent for keeping my shooting-boots in order!"

They strolled onwards, three abreast. "Oh that Colin could see me now," thought Christina, "with so goodly and distinguished a companion on either side of me!"

"You're stopping here, of course, ain't you?" said the duke to Lord Hardcastle, who replied, "Yes; the duchess asked me to come to-morrow, but the flesh is weak, and when I could no longer endure my aunt's eyes fixed upon my hair I asked if I might drive over here a day sooner."

Mr. Prendergast came out on the steps to greet them, looking at them at first dreamily, as he always did when newly awakened from deep study among his books; and the younger men returned his greeting with an affectionate, "Well, philosopher, so awf'ly glad to see you!"

"I have a crow to pick with you," said his stepson, leading his stepfather into the library, "and you are going to have a bad quarter of an hour with me."

They disappeared into the library together, and Christina and Lord Hardcastle sat down on one of the sofas in the hall.

"I always think this is such a charming old house," said Barny, looking up at the great arched roof of the room, and the gray stone pillars which supported it.

"Shall I tell you how I hid behind those pillars one night?" said Christina; and she made Lord Hardcastle laugh over her adventure until the roof echoed with the sound of it.

"Tim really should have warned you," he said at last. "We all love the little duchess, and respect her Spartan methods of retrieving the family fortunes. The old lady, you know—Tim's grandmother—the racing duchess, as she is called, lost all her money, and even some of the family property, in laying long odds upon quite impossible horses. And now poor Tim has to pay her jointure, and his mother's, out of a very reduced estate. Are you hungry now?" he asked Christina humorously, when she had finished her recital.

"Not hungry," said Christina, "but greedy. I believe I shall always be greedy now till the end of my life!"

"And you really came down here in the moonlight, and hid behind the pillars?" laughing again. "By-the-bye, have they put up the electric light here yet? The philosopher is always talking about it; and I believe it is now to be done, and paid for from that mysterious fund which he explains to the duchess as a

sort of perennial influx from some unknown and eminently successful investment."

"I believe," said Christina, "the lights are being put in now. I know that a number of workmen arrived to-day."

"It will be an immense improvement," said Lord Hardcastle, "for the one fault of this old hall is that it is so dark."

When they parted to dress for dinner the duke, who had joined them, said to Christina, "I have reduced the philosopher to a state of penitence bordering on despair."

"Which would be very much deeper, and more despairing, if he could but know how Miss M'Nab stood outside his room of feasting, and sniffed the faint odour of lamb and mint sauce——"

"No, no—not really," interpolated the duke.

"I believe the duchess still thinks I was a wraith," said Christina, turning her big gray eyes upon the duke, "for she has never spoken to me since about our meeting in the corridor."

"Were you dressed all in white like a ghost?" asked Lord Hardcastle.

And the two men began playfully describing to each other the scene, enjoying their own descriptions of beautiful Christina creeping from pillar to pillar in the moonlight.

"Remember, you are to come to supper with us to-night," said the duke. "The house-party proper does not arrive till to-morrow, and dinner will be as frugal an affair as usual. Now listen!" smiling as he talked, and shaking his finger at the girl; "this is the rule of the house when we are alone. You say good-

night to my mother, who always goes to bed early, at ten o'clock, and you go to your room, and immediately afterwards you walk along the corridor to the baize door at the far end, and walk down the staircase which leads straight into the library, and there we hold our midnight revels ! ”

The clear soup barely covering the silver plate, the morsel of salmon, and fairy slice of game, which were served as usual by the four solemn menservants in the tapestry dining-room, had never before tasted half so good. Between buns and supper, such a meal was perfection. The duchess having no viands to help, had the decanters placed in front of her, and directed the butler to give Mr. Prendergast some port when he had asked for claret, with the usual rapid glance round the centre decoration of the table and the quick command, “ You will take a little port, Mimsey ? ” to which the philosopher responded, “ Thank you ; I really think I *should* like a little port to-night.”

The guilty feeling with which Christina bade her hostess “ good-night ” was overcome by her feelings of anticipation of the novel delights of a stolen supper. The philosopher met her at the door of the library, as she came down the staircase in her long black evening gown, and laughingly said to her, “ I am going to give you three dry biscuits to keep you company at night ! ”

What fun they had behind those closed baize doors in the library that evening ! The philosopher beamed at them in his genial way behind his spectacles, that glistened with good-humour and kindness, as he told them stories of travel and adventure, or humorous tales of the people he had met in his long and varied life.

"To-morrow, alas!" he said, as he bade Christina "good-night," "we shall have to eat a large dinner in the dining-room, and there will be no midnight supper."

"I think," said Christina, "it is because we all feel so guilty that we have enjoyed this supper-party so much; but I would fain not think it wrong, it was so delightful!"

"We must have some more guilty supper-parties," he replied, smiling, "when our other guests have left us. But Tim, unfortunately, can only stay a few days. —I don't know what you are doing, Hardcastle!"

It was discovered that both men were leaving on the fourth day. Something suddenly told Christina that she had better take a house in town for the season.

CHAPTER XIII.

A VERY large party invaded Timworth Castle the next day. The electric lighting of the ballroom was now finished, and a dance was to be held there on the second evening after the guests arrived.

"If Mimsey likes to spend his money in this way," said the duchess, pausing in her morning's exercise with the skipping-rope, "he must do as he likes. My money goes to Tim, and he might be saving these sudden accessions of good fortune for his old age. Do not let Mimsey bore you," she called out to two young men who were walking up and down the broad gravel sweep in front of the entrance-doors, in earnest conversation with their guide, philosopher, and friend. Young men had that reverent love for the philosopher which his teaching and his charming personality inspired. Then she turned to her skipping again, remarking in a gasping sort of way between her jumps, "My husband always does talk such a lot of nonsense; I am dreadfully afraid of his boring people."

Later in the day, when Mr. Prendergast's old friend, the Professor of Greek, had arrived, there was an earnest discussion going on at his end of the luncheon-table with two or three Oxford men and others who were interested in the subject of the professor's book.

"The law of Evolution is not the law of Love," said the gray-haired Greek professor, his old cheeks flushed

with the strength of the convictions that he was now putting into words. "The law of Evolution is not the law of Love," he repeated; "prove it, my dear Prendergast, if you can!"

"I believe in the gift of Death," said the philosopher, in his fine sonorous voice; "I believe in the dignity and beauty of sacrifice *quâ* sacrifice; and I think," he added, and shook back with a gesture his thick gray hair—"I think and believe with all my heart——"

"My dear Mimsey," said the duchess, with her little jerking glance round the flower garlands, "you really mustn't talk such nonsense! People will think you are an idiot."

A day or two after this, when Christina was walking with the philosopher, he remarked to her that his wife was a woman of extraordinary intellect.

Christina thought it was a little unkind of a man to speak in this ironic way of his wife, until she found that Mr. Prendergast was perfectly earnest and ingenuous in his estimate of the duchess.

"She has such extraordinary insight into things," he said to her, "and such a keen critical faculty, that I hardly ever know the faults of my writings until I have submitted them to her."

Mr. Prendergast made a charming host—a character easy to give and as difficult to define; and it would be difficult to say exactly where lay the charm of the entertainment at Timworth Castle which made it so popular a resort. People whom one would never suspect of any desire to meet each other were drawn together in this pleasantest of country houses; and friendships

were formed between the most unlikely people, and generally lasted for a lifetime. Nothing was ever forced upon Mr. Prendergast's guests, either in the way of discussions or of amusements; yet discussions formed themselves naturally, and were listened to eagerly, and amusements seemed to come with a sort of easy unconsciousness which concealed the fact that they were amusements at all. The duchess, with her dogs and her calisthenic exercises, was a singular adjunct to the stately house and its gray-haired master, but the little lady was so full of good nature that, with all her oddities, she was no check on any one's enjoyment; and the rather exacting attentions which some hostesses demand were never required by one who amused herself without assistance, as did the duchess. The vulgarity which distinguishes much modern hospitality was not known at Timworth Castle. Ladies with vague husbands were not invited to meet their particular friends there; and the tales which maids tell each other in the house-keeper's room, or which furnish material for shilling "shockers" or the Divorce Court, did not have their origin in Mr. Prendergast's house.

In the hour that comes between the lights the library was generally invaded by those who knocked at the door and asked for a book from the shelves, but who generally remained to sit by the fire of logs and chat with the philosopher, whose spare time this was.

"Let us discuss the Universe," he would say with a smile, wheeling round a great leather-covered chair to some friend who had invaded the sanctity of his own particular room. And in the dim light mind spoke to mind with a security which glaring light forbids.

"I don't want to discuss the Universe," said Mrs. Abbott, the author of some novels written in English so good that they were called pedantic and dull—"I don't want to discuss the Universe, philosopher; I want you to help me with a description. How does one describe a gentleman? The clumsy expression 'gentlemanlike' always seems to me to savour of 'John Thomas' and the servants' hall; and though there is no one more easy to recognize than a gentleman, he is a difficult person to describe."

The Professor of Greek laid down a book that he was reading and said, "My description of a gentleman is in the Fifteenth Psalm."

"You have to travel a long way back," laughed some one else, "to find a gentleman. I suppose that is because we are all rather vulgar nowadays."

"There I do not agree with you," said Mrs. Abbott quickly, "though I know that that sweeping condemnation commends itself to many. Indeed, if you will allow me to say so, I believe that the phrase has become almost a vulgarism in itself. There is a touch of self-glorification in it, as though the person who pronounced judgment had within him some standard of nobility to which no one that he knew could attain."

"I think," said the philosopher, "that I should describe a gentleman as one who appealed to our highest—one who called forth our best." And quite unconsciously he rose from his chair and walked across the room to where Lord Hardcastle was sitting, and laid his hand with a caressing touch upon his shoulder.

The duke said, "I think all the fellows one knows are decently well-bred, and all that." But it was not

thought that this remark added greatly to the interest of the discussion.

"I agree with Mrs. Abbott," said Lord Hardcastle. "I think the sort of people who are always bewailing modern vulgarity have, perhaps, not very much opportunity for seeing anything else."

Mrs. Abbott thanked him with a smile, and said, "The argument which amuses me nowadays is the one which pleads that when woman has become a thinking animal man will cease to be courteous."

"Yes," said the philosopher, laughing, "I have always found that there is in many people's minds an idea that when women have been given a seat in Parliament they will no longer be offered a seat in an omnibus."

The tap-tap of the duchess's battledore, as she got some exercise in the hall by sending her shuttlecock from one end of it to the other, could be heard as the door opened to admit Christina. She was always a welcome guest in the library, and the philosopher had already described her to his old friend Mr. Langton—the Professor of Greek—as one of the few women he knew who did not smile unnecessarily. "When she does smile," he had said, "it is worth remembering."

"Come and help us!" he cried, drawing her favourite chair close to his own; "Mrs. Abbott has set us a puzzle which none of us can solve. How would one describe a gentleman? What is *your* definition?"

"Well," said Christina, "I do know something about this subject, for I heard it earnestly discussed the other day by Mrs. Lumley and her sister. Mrs. Lumley said a man was a gentleman who never wore a tall hat upon

the wrong occasion ; and Mrs. Lumley's sister added that he did not use a purse ! ”

The duchess had insisted that the ball which was to take place in the evening should be a fancy dress one, in order that she might appear in her favourite character as Titania. This costume gave the lady the opportunity of flying hither and thither on her gauze wings with as much rapidity as she liked. Wings excused her Grace's flying movements, and ought really to have been attached to her shoulders at all times. Every one else appeared in the costume which seemed to suit him or her best, and as no one thought of anything but their several costumes, the ball had that lack of interest which seems inseparable from all fancy dress balls. The subject of clothes, even from a feminine standpoint, is not sufficiently diverting for a whole evening. The gentlemen were, for the most part, self-conscious and unhappy in their unproven garments, and having condescended to silks and satins, thought it manly to speak in a despising way of these materials.

Miss Anstruther, to whom Christina had confided the choice of her dress, had sent a robe of such exquisite simplicity that it would have been a severe test to any beauty less assured than Christina's. Without descending to any strict botanical classification, Miss Anstruther called the costume simply “ A Lily,” and one great petal of white satin rose high behind Christina's golden head, and made a background of shimmering white, looking almost like a silver halo round the head of some saint of long ago. The girl obtained a ballroom triumph, so dear to girlhood, and no one seemed to have eyes for any one else in the room. The

long plain satin dress could be seen here and there moving with simple dignity, and Christina's "Academy" steps, which were certainly less prim now than they had been at her first dance, were called dignified and stately by an admiring circle that watched her dancing through the first set of Lancers. Lord Granston was her partner, and Lord Granston, as he himself would have expressed it, was "struck all of a heap." He was a person of goodly countenance himself, and his flowered satin coat and powdered head showed off his beauty to advantage. Always, too, this pleasant-mannered youth had almost an old-fashioned courtliness in his air. He could dance a minuet better than any man in England, and somewhat loved an occasion like the present, when his natural courtliness was excused by his dress. His fastidiousness was entirely satisfied by Christina's calm demeanour, her stately steps, and her beautiful dress. It was a distinct artistic pleasure to lead this lady through the measured figures of the Lancers, and when they made their bows to each other, Lord Granston felt, for the first time in his life, that his niceness of discrimination was perfectly satisfied.

At the top of the room the duchess was flying through the dance in a very different way, and her directions at starting had simply been, "When in doubt, *chassez* wildly." One unfortunate young man had been sent flying to the far corner of the room by reason of his hands having become unlocked in a mad spin round the ladies clustered together in one of the figures, and dresses were torn and hair ruffled with amazing good temper and energy.

"Let us leave this room and go and sit in the gallery,"

said Lord Granston, when the Lancers had ended. And he offered Christina his arm in his graceful fashion, and together they went up the broad stairs, and into the long gallery, with its palms and sofas placed there for the dancers.

The gallery was dim, the installation of electric light in the house not having been completed; but out in the broad corridor there was a blaze of light. In the archway leading from it Lord Hardcastle met her, and then the Duke of Southwark; and the four friends, in very beautiful and regal attire, stood framed in the doorway, and with the lamps behind them, making indeed an attractive picture. Lord Hardcastle and the duke both claimed the next dance on Christina's programme, and Lord Granston with a charming air, such as his satin coat allowed, bent and kissed the fair girl's hand, and said, "I give my lily up, but I wear her on my heart," and bowed to the ground with his hand upon his sword. The picture was complete and perfect in its way, and a young man standing at the far end of the gallery almost clapped his hands.

"And now you've got to choose between us two," said Lord Hardcastle. "Will you decide? or shall we draw swords for you?"

"I am very hot," said Christina in her simple way, and looking from one to another with gray eyes in which there was an intoxicating light. "I will dance with whoever will first find my fan and bring it to me down there at the end of the gallery, where it is cool and quiet." Following the example of her lately discharged cavalier, Christina swept the gentlemen a splendid curtsy. They raised her hand to their

lips, and departed on their quest; and Christina floated down the long gallery between the palms and the couches—a tall, beautiful lily, with a golden head. Her head was held very high. This splendid evening was a triumph, and the quiet eyes shone. The light kisses of the knights who had flown to do her bidding lingered on her hand; Christina was in fairyland! The young man in the gallery, who had longed to applaud the picture with its background of light in the archway, still stood by the window with a coil of wires about his shoulder.

“Colin!” said Christina.

“The lights have gone wrong,” said Colin simply, “and they telegraphed for me to come down and put them to rights. I must not touch you,” he said, “for my hands are rather black.”

“Colin,” faltered Christina, sinking on to a couch “I wish you hadn’t come.”

“I was very pleased to come,” said Colin; “and I am very pleased to see you to-night, and all the ladies in their pretty dresses.”

The Scottish accent sent Christina’s thoughts a long way back. “It seems so long since those old days,” she said. And for some unknown reason the light went out of her eyes and her voice faltered.

“I am going to be in London now,” said Colin; “the firm is sending me there, and I am to be at the head of the office.”

“I am not caring,” said Christina petulantly. “I want you to tell me that my dress is beautiful, and that I am looking lovely, as other gentlemen do.”

“I am not sure that I like that thing behind your

head," said Colin critically; "it looks too like a jug or something."

"I am a lily," said Christina crossly.

Colin laughed. "You beat them all," he said in a tone of satisfaction.

"You think I do—you really think I do, Colin?"

"Yes," said Colin simply. "You know I always thought there was no one in the world like you; but I do not like the way you do your hair."

"The duke likes it," said Christina haughtily.

"Was the duke the one who kissed your hand just now?"

"They all kissed my hand."

"I am aware of that," said Colin, smiling; "but the one who kissed it first was the one who kissed it as if he meant it."

"That was Lord Granston," said Christina, in a disappointed tone; "but I wish it had been the duke who had kissed it as though he meant it."

"*Pairsevere!*" was Colin's sole comment.

"I like him very much," said Christina nervously. "Even if he were not a duke I should like him."

"He looks a real nice lad," said Colin kindly.

"It is a good thing," said Christina, flushing a little, "that some people I could name like me better than ever *you* used to do. *They* wouldn't be so pleased to hear that I was going to marry another."

Colin threw back his head and laughed.

"Oh, you may not have heard the news yet," said Christina angrily, "but you *will* hear it soon; and I am going to have a house in town myself this season, and give grand parties, and go to Court. The duchess herself is going to present me!"

"I believe you go in a white dress the first time," said Colin, "and carry a bouquet. No doubt the duchess will put you up to the proper way of doing things, but I should like you to have everything very correct."

"Thank you!"

"I will find out for you what are the most fashionable parts of London, and get you a house in one of them."

"I have a great fancy for one in Grosvenor Square," said Christina.

And Colin took out his notebook and took down the address, saying, "I'll see that you get one, if it is to be had."

"How is the assistant?" asked Christina.

To which Colin replied that the assistant was doing fine, and was preaching splendid sermons to crowded congregations on the sin of worldliness and the temptation of riches.

"That will be a relief to his feelings," said Christina. "I suppose he intends them all for me."

"Yes," said Colin judicially. "And I would have checked him, but that I believe a man has a right to relieve his feelings in a harmless way; and his denunciations do not harm you."

"I am getting very worldly," said Christina; "but you can just tell the assistant that if he were in my place he would become worldly too."

"Hoots!" said Colin cheerfully, "you are not very far on the wrong road."

"Colin," said Christina, a little wistfully—the stately lily's golden head was drooping a little, and the soft voice had a touch of pleading in it—"I would like to have

a talk with you again. I have not many old friends here, and I would just like to see you and ask you——”

“I am off again by the six o'clock train to-morrow morning——”

“—If you could wait——”

At this moment a lordly figure in low shoes and brocaded coat came along the corridor; his feet with their fine patrician tread, so used to polished floors and lofty galleries, came towards them through the palms and foliage.

“Good-bye,” said Colin, rising and preparing to leave by the lower door of the gallery.

“Colin M'Crae,” said Christina, “there is not a more cold-hearted young man than you in the length and breadth of Scotland, and I am very glad that there are others who love me better !”

CHAPTER XIV.

JUDITH CAMPBELL wrote to Miss M'Nab while she was still staying at Timworth Castle, and said to her, "I hear you are looking out for a house in London. Why not come and stay with us for a few days, and let us do some house-hunting together? We can give you a room in this flat in which the proverbial cat would have an uneasy time, and there isn't even a hole for your maid; but do come next Friday!—Yours ever,

"JUDITH CAMPBELL.

"*P.S.*—Mother will send the carriage to meet you. Look out for the shabbiest brougham at King's Cross Station, and a coachman like a grave-digger, and you will know that it is the family chariot! Mother says she would be glad to help you to get servants.

"*P.P.S.*—Do you want a sheep-dog?"

Everything promised well for Christina's first season in town. She took a charming furnished house in Grosvenor Square, this having been secured for her by her friend, Mr. M'Crae; and dear homely Mrs. Campbell, who enjoyed nothing so much as engaging servants, secured a fitting number of housemaids, menservants, and cooks. Meanwhile, every single lady of Christina's acquaintance wrote and recommended to her some poor

relation who would make a discreet and invaluable chaperon and companion. Each one of these poor relations was described as "a perfect dear;" and the fact that each was at present homeless, unemployed, and friendless, never seemed to strike their patronesses as being any argument against the excellent character that they gave them. In the end, Christina secured the services of a widowed lady of gentle manners and refined appearance—the fact that she seemed to be related to no one, but was only a very dear friend of Mrs. Campbell's, being a strong argument in her favour.

The fortnight at the Campbells' flat passed very brightly and pleasantly. Judith introduced to her guest all her own ineligible young men—ineligible because she never, for an instant, entertained the addresses of an eligible one—and explained to Christina that they were "no use," from which Christina gathered that they were not marriageable.

"But when you only want something in trousers," said Judith easily, "you will find them very handy; and they are all the dearest boys."

The Campbells took Christina to her first theatre. Judith enjoyed the play immensely, and Christina lay awake for a whole night afterwards, thinking how very wicked it had been.

"I'll have to get used to this place," she thought; "but it is terrible to have to sit and hear such things discussed. A book doesn't seem so bad, because it is between boards, and there is a sort of privacy about it; plays are just dreadful, but I'm afraid it isn't the fashion to be shocked."

Besides her penniless young men, Judith introduced her

to a great number of pleasant people, who all hoped to call upon the heiress when she was settled at Grosvenor Square. They asked her now to informal little dinners at their own houses, or to dine at hot, magnificent restaurants which smelt of dinner and tobacco-smoke, and where "smartness" might be purchased at the low price of a few guineas, including a very fair dinner. There were suppers, too, after the play, at these same gorgeously-decorated eating-houses, and Christina found that it added much to every one's interest and pleasure if some actress who had been playing on the boards that night came on to the same entertainment. The proximity even of a chorus girl was a matter of excitement to smart folk, and they would say to each other in delighted whispers, "There is Connie Travers, or Cissy Tremaine," referring to some young lady whose performance an hour before had not added in a marked degree to any one's enjoyment.

In the middle of May Christina said "*Au revoir*" to her friends and their tiny, expensive flat, and went with Mrs. Hayes to the big house in Grosvenor Square, with its palm-filled halls and drawing-rooms and wide staircase with marble steps. Her hall-table was soon covered with cards, and her carriage, with its fine gray horses, took her out to pay calls. Madam This and Miss That (a dear girl—so poor, and trying to make hats pay!) dressed her in the latest fashions. A Bond Street jeweller had the honour of waiting upon her, and of receiving an order for a necklace of diamonds and other ornaments; and everything was made very easy for the young lady with the long purse who had come to Vanity Fair. Christina made her bow to her Sov-

ereign, and was invited to numerous parties, balls, and routs. Lilah Anstruther enjoyed nothing so much as a morning's shopping with her in Bond Street, and very beautiful were the works of art which she devised for her friend's adornment. Christina had her portrait painted and her photograph taken, and flattering accounts of her and her unusual beauty appeared in journals whose circulation depended upon the meed of praise which they gave to the right people.

There were also to be found persons of experience willing to give Christina the benefit of that experience, and to steer her course through the shoals and quicksands of Society, gaining for themselves, it may be, a certain distinction from their privileged position as pilot to so fair and well-laden a ship. Such, for instance, was Lady Tarbutt, particular but broad-minded—oh, happy combination!—who ran millionaires as a fashionable pursuit, and could give introductions to the best houses in London.

The Dickson-Clays, whose breathless climbing had landed them upon an eminence in Society from which they could look down upon South Kensington, eagerly sought the acquaintanceship of Miss M'Nab. They called upon her with devoted punctuality, took her to the Park, and were able to point out to a nicety the yards of pathway where it was fashionable to walk, and the forbidden ways that lay beyond this line of demarcation, where it was unpardonable to be seen. The Dickson-Clays knew every possible and impossible rule of Society, and they studied them so carefully that they had never been known to make a mistake. Their cards of invitation were sent out with scrupulous exactness, the word-

ing of them correct, and the very cards upon which they were printed being of the orthodox pattern. If blue was the fashionable colour of the season, the Miss Dickson-Clays were to be seen in blue. If rinking was the fashion, the Miss Dickson-Clays rinked. Did slumming become the vogue, they slummed. Even the religion of the Dickson-Clays was fashionable, and the very latest thing from New York or Hindostan was adopted with fervour for the two or three seasons during which they were in vogue by these devoted votaries of fashion.

Mrs. Vigors and her friend Miss Leech—"that poor Leech girl," as she was called—took an early opportunity of being introduced to the heiress, and of calling upon her. Miss Leech was that modern product, a girl-chaperon. It is interesting to note the phases that have attended this matter of the care of our women in England. Long, long ago—only, of course, no one can remember this bygone time—it is recorded as a matter of ancient history that young ladies were supposed to return to their mammas and chaperons between the dances, and even in extreme cases to introduce their partners to them. Twenty years later, mammas looked after their daughters without interfering much with them. They smiled sleepily on the back benches of a ballroom, occupied, it is true, a considerable amount of space, and were taken in to supper with some formality, according to their rank. Since then the career of the chaperon has been brief and her downfall complete. Mammas refused to chaperon daughters; daughters refused to be chaperoned by mammas. Hostesses refused to have back benches in drawing-rooms, and Society, after first shrieking in horror, "The new woman! she comes, she comes!"

gradually learnt that no particular danger attaches itself to girls dancing in a friend's drawing-room without the sleepy protecting eye of mamma upon them. The emancipation of the daughters was triumphant and complete ; but the tables were cruelly turned upon them when mammas were no longer allowed to occupy back benches : *they danced*, while the girls sat down ! Matrimony was no more the final exit from the polished floors of ball-rooms. No one's dancing days were ever over, and girls sighed for the good old times, as they watched matrons whirling by on a cherished partner's arm, or acted as green gooseberry through the flirtations of their married lady friends, and were relegated to the companionship of some old gentleman who paid them compliments, or a beardless boy whom nobody wanted. " We have our independence," sighed the maidens, " and in years to come men will have grown accustomed to our being free, and we shall profit by it. But for the present they are afraid of it, and only the married woman, sheltering beneath our maidenhood, profits by it at all."

Miss Leech had been Mrs. Vigors's faithful companion and chaperon ever since that unfortunate season when, having done pretty much as she liked for many seasons, Mrs. Vigors was " talked about " with Captain Bruce, which shows, as Mrs. Vigors always said, that it depends upon where you live and who the man is ! No one had ever commented upon Mrs. Vigors's behaviour when she lived in Belgrave Road ; but having moved to a newly-decorated house in Green Street, and walked in the Park with Captain Bruce, who was smart, the world talked. Miss Leech's constant attendance was the stopper that Mrs. Vigors had placed upon the lips of Society. Miss

Leech was Mrs. Vigors's appeal to the nations that her respectability was unimpeachable, so she was never seen without Miss Leech. Not that the girl lived in the house : a paid companion would give an air of suspicion to an establishment. She was only a "dear friend," unpaid, save by such chiffons as fell from the rich woman's table. And coming from a dull home where her presence was not demanded, Miss Leech was able to believe in Mrs. Vigors's integrity, and to gain an entry into a world more amusing and brighter than her own by reason of this impregnable faith in her patroness. Mrs. Vigors was now re-established. She went everywhere, and did everything ; but, as a matter of choice, she preferred, perhaps, to take for her friends some new arrival in Vanity Fair who did not remember that awful season when invitations had been few, and Captain Bruce's visits many. The contemptible little woman, whose highest standard of right and wrong was the opinion of the world, acted with great discretion on all points. She dropped Miss Leech altogether, and gained a reflected glory by driving the popular heiress in her carriage, and taking her to parties where their two names were generally to be seen coupled together.

Lilah Anstruther said to Christina one day, "My dear, why do you go about with the Vigors woman?"

"Is there any reason why I shouldn't? Is she a wicked woman?" asked Christina, whose simple rectitude and old-fashioned faith could see no shade of gray in the matter of conduct, but whose black was black, and her white, white.

"Oh no; of course not. Every one knows her, but she ran a narrow shave of being cut a year or two

ago," replied Lilah. "I suppose she writes notes to you every day. You must tell fibs and say you are always engaged. She will soon understand."

London was certainly a dreadful place, and Christina's opinion of it had never been shaken since the first evening she arrived at Euston Station. The next morning, when Mrs. Vigors's daily note arrived, suggesting some afternoon teas and a drive in the Park together, Christina's grave reply was to the effect that she thanked Mrs. Vigors very much, but begged to be excused that afternoon from accepting her polite invitation. Mrs. Vigors understood, and said to herself, "I wish one knew exactly what people said of one!" For the worshippers of public opinion are ever at a discount; the voice for whose inflections they so keenly wait is seldom above a whisper, and cannot be clearly heard.

The Dickson-Clays redoubled their attentions to Miss M'Nab; and Lilah, in her character of Mentor, said, "Oh, know them if you like. They are all right—vulgar but not vicious; so many people are both."

Lady Tarbutt had decided that Christina should marry her second son. "I cannot stand tubes for the eldest," she said; "but for Clifford, on his lieutenant's pay, Christina would be admirably suited."

Clifford was home on leave, and Lady Tarbutt became almost peremptory in her advice to Christina to marry her boy. She seldom allowed the girl two minutes' conversation with any other gentleman in the room when Clifford was present; and she had an alarming way of bearing down upon a group, and extracting Christina from it in much the same way as an eagle would swoop down upon a flock of sheep, and carry off a pet morsel to its eyrie.

"It is ridiculous that she does not like Cliff," said Lady Tarbutt one day, when talking to her friend Lady Mabel Dundas. "Clifford is young, good-looking, and he will have the Buckinghamshire place. What more does she want? I do dislike these slow, deliberate Scottish ways."

"She is very charming, isn't she?" said Lady Mabel. "I have not seen her yet, but my brother met her down at Popples, and has asked Muriel and me to call upon her."

"We are going this afternoon," said Muriel.

"I wish you could find out," said Lady Tarbutt, "when you are there, if she has really made up her mind to capture the Duke of Southwark. Of course, if she means to have him, I'll try for something else for Cliff. There is that Eisler girl, with thousands a year in oil; but then I never know how long oil goes on running, or whether it will suddenly stop one day. I wish one knew more about these things. And I believe there is a girl who makes machines or something who has bought a lovely place in the Midlands. I could send Cliff down to stay near there, if Miss M'Nab is obdurate."

Lady Muriel Stonor, whose parents were dead, lived with her sister, at whose house Lady Tarbutt had been calling. She was a tiny creature, very fair and very pretty, with a little wistful face and golden hair; and as she and Lady Mabel were starting for their drive that afternoon, she raised big swimming eyes to Mabel's face, and said with trembling lips, "Please, I don't think I want to go."

"I don't think I should believe a word Lady Tarbutt says," replied Mabel energetically.

"But you know it would be a good thing for him," said Muriel; "only I do love him so," she added, putting a little cambric pocket-handkerchief to her eyes.

"Come and call upon her," said Mabel, linking her arm in her sister's; "things will be so much easier when we have seen Miss M'Nab, and made up our minds what sort of girl she is."

Miss M'Nab was at home, and received her guests in a vast white drawing-room half filled with pink azaleas. The sisters introduced themselves, and made a few pleasant remarks about Christina's acquaintance with their brother. They talked about the Drummonds and Poplar's Court; and Muriel, who had sat with downcast eyes looking at the very pretty white gloved hands that lay in her lap, looked up suddenly, and said, "Southwark stayed at Popples for a time also, did he not?"

"Yes," said Christina, "and he has been to call upon me several times since I came to London."

Muriel gave her sister a despairing glance.

"Tim is a nice boy, isn't he?" said Mabel, knowing from the glance that the subject was to be continued, if possible.

"A most agreeable young man," said Christina.

Differences must be allowed for nationality, but Lady Muriel brightened at Christina's response. She herself could never have described "dear Tim" as an agreeable young man. "Did he stay long?" she asked feverishly.

"Ten days the first time, and five days the second time," replied Christina, "and I met him afterwards at his mamma's."

"Anne told us you had gone on to Timworth," said Lady Mabel. "Is the duchess as energetic as ever?"

Christina said, "Yes, she is a perfect tornado!"

"And Southwark was there too, you say?" interposed Muriel again. "He said he was going there, but I do not think he told us how long he stayed."

"Nearly a week," replied Christina.

Muriel gave her sister a tragic look, and presently they rose and took their leave.

"I hope you will come and see us," said Mabel kindly, "and we must ask Southwark to come too. Will you dine with us some evening? It will be so nice if you will."

An arrangement was made for a quiet dinner-party the following week, and having shaken hands, Christina walked to the staircase with her friends, and made two separate and distinct remarks to them over the banisters, which she understood was the correct thing to do. She then returned to the azaleas in the drawing-room, and watched the Dundases' carriage drive away. "Those will be Captain Stonor's sisters," she said, "keeking" from behind the blinds, "and I think I have heard the duke mention them. I wish he had come in when they were here; but, after all, perhaps he does not know them very well, and he did not think he would be able to call till after five o'clock."

A few minutes later, the young duke with his red hair, his light eyelashes, and his delightful smile, entered the room. "I met Lady Mabel Dundas and her sister just now," he remarked; "they tell me that you are dining with them next week, and that I am to come too. I am so glad; I have wanted you to know them."

"Why?" said Christina.

The duke smiled foolishly, and broke into a laugh.

"I wanted you very particularly to know them," he said, as though there was some exquisite joke, which only he could see.

Christina was pleased. She thought, "He wants me to know his friends; and what should that be for unless he has intentions? But, guid-sakes, what a time the laddie was making up his mind!"

The young man ate his usual hearty tea, and made a dozen plans for Christina's amusement. "I want you to see a lot of Lady Mabel and her sister," he said. "We might have a day on the river, mightn't we? or I could get Venables to drive us on his coach to Dorking, but let us have a happy day somewhere."

Christina was pleasant and accommodating, as usual, and thought she would prefer a coaching party to a day on the river. Then, recollecting that there was little privacy to be had on the top of a coach, while in boats couples could pair off as they liked, she changed her mind, and voted for a picnic on the river.

"After all," she said firmly, "I should prefer the water party;" and the duke acquiesced easily.

"We can go down rather late, when it is cool," he said, "and then row, and dine at one of the inns."

This exactly suited Christina's ideas of furnishing an opportunity for a declaration of love.

"Will you row me?" she said, in her business-like way. The daughter of the maker of tubes left nothing to chance.

And the duke replied, "Oh, ah—yes, of course, delighted, delighted—unless," he added lamely, "you would prefer some one else! Bunkins, for instance, is a much better oar than I am."

But Christina was firm. "I should prefer *you* to row me," she replied.

The following week, a very bright, chatty, well-dressed party assembled at Waterloo Station, clad in light colours, and with sunshades, and dust cloaks on their arms, to go down and have a picnic on the river. Some footmen were in charge of the baskets, and the duke's superior valet stood guard over the door of a saloon carriage, and had already furnished the centre table of the compartment with an abundant supply of light literature and flowers. The superior valet presently announced that the party had better take their seats, and the ladies entering first, sat side by side, while the gentlemen grouped themselves together at the other end of the carriage. The arrangement was not considered to be a happy one, but it was maintained until Windsor was reached, when the better disposition of the party was attempted. The duke said feebly, "How are we to divide?" and thus made it quite impossible for his guests to state their wishes in respect of their companion for the afternoon. The girls put on an oblivious expression, and several gentlemen gave whispered advice to the duke, while the boatmen on the bank wanted to give assistance, and the party delayed itself in a hopeless sort of indecision. The opportunity was Lady Tarbutt's, and she profited by it.

"What are we all waiting for?" she said briskly. "Cliff, you take Miss M'Nab. Mr. Anstruther, please row Lady Mabel Dundas. Now, dear Miss Campbell, whom shall I appoint to look after you? Mr. Venables—capital!"

"A horrid, rich young man like that," murmured

Judith—"a wretch who knows his value with mammas, and whom girls run after. Well, he shall not have a pleasant row this afternoon—of that I am determined!"

Another young man of the party was evidently not to have a very enjoyable afternoon either. He sat in the boat with a silent, regretful beauty, whom his mother—ignoring all Christina's protestations as to other arrangements having been made previously—had herself assisted into the boat, with a bright decision that was impossible to combat.

Lady Tarbutt continued her despotic marshalling, ending up with, "Dear me, Captain Stonor, I am afraid there is no one left for you but your sister!"

Here the duke interposed, and said, "I am afraid that won't do. Will you look after Miss Anstruther, Thomas?" he said to Captain Stonor, and seated himself in the boat with Thomas's sister Muriel.

"You ought to have rowed Miss M'Nab, Tim," said Muriel as soon as the boat had shot away from the bank, raising her big eyes, from which the tears never seemed very far away in these days, to the young ruddy-cheeked man with his light eyelashes and sandy hair, and the commonplace jolly face which Muriel was convinced was handsomer than any other in England.

"I ought," replied Tim, smiling as he spoke, with that air of irrepressible jollity which distinguished him—"I ought, no doubt, but you see I didn't."

Muriel locked two very small white hands together upon the lap of a babyish little muslin gown with blue ribbons, in which she looked an adorable person altogether. "Tim," she said, "I have been thinking about something for a long time, and I want to speak to you

about it. You know I have not a penny in the world, and you have not a penny in the world, except about eight hundred pounds a year, poor Tim."

"Granny cannot go on backing wrong uns for ever," said the duke hopefully. "She is nearly seventy now, and you know when I have not her jointure to pay, I shall be much better off than I am now."

"She will leave a great many debts behind her," said Muriel, shaking her head. "Mabel's husband says that she has been losing a great deal of money lately; he calls her 'the bookie's friend.' Oh, why are old ladies so sporting?"

"I confess," said the duke, "that I did not make a very wise selection when I chose my grandmother; and I have not brought her up very carefully, I'm afraid."

"O Tim, you laugh," cried Muriel tragically, "but to me it is all so very sad."

"To me it is not all very sad," said Tim, resting on his oars, and leaning forward to take a long look into the blue eyes under the shady hat, "because I know I am so awfully fond of you, and always have been, and always shall be; so what is the good of bothering?"

Muriel gave him one expressive glance, in which the love of a lifetime—not a very long life, it is true, but a very guileless and sweet little existence—was sent like a bow from an arrow straight into a commonplace, healthy, happy young Englishman's heart.

"But I want you to be very sensible, dear," Muriel went on, "and I am really speaking in earnest. I want you to give up thinking about me altogether. We might be quite old people before we were able to marry, and even then, Tim, you would never be able to live at any

of your own places, unless you found coal, or something."

"Do you think the sudden discovery of coal at Timworth would really save me?" laughed the duke.

"Please don't laugh, Tim. We went to call on Miss M'Nab the other day; she is so lovely, I think, and she has twenty thousand a year which her father made in tubes, or something. But it is all hers, every penny of it; and not only that, but Lady Tarbutt seems to think that she likes you very much. I think—I think you ought to forget all about me, and marry Christina M'Nab."

The duke threw back his head, and laughed again. "Christina is perfectly charming," he said; "but then, you know, she isn't *you*."

"I cannot make you serious," sighed Muriel.

"Well, now, I am going to be quite serious, and if you would just take the tiller ropes, instead of clasping your hands in that sweet little way, we shouldn't run into quite so many boats as we seem to have been doing."

Lady Muriel obediently took the white cords in her tiny hands, and by sharply pulling the wrong one, very nearly finished her serious conversation by plunging them both into the water. Her mistake having been repaired, the duke settled to his rowing with long, easy strokes, and the lady with the blue eyes and the chum-like little face continued to give her sage counsel.

"I want you to promise me one thing, Tim. You know we have always considered we were engaged to each other ever since we were quite little children."

"Yes, I know that," said the duke—"ever since you wore short frocks and blue ribbons, and had your hair down your back."

"Well, just for the present, I want you not to consider yourself engaged to me any more. I ask this as a very special favour."

"I don't think it matters," said the duke, "whether we are engaged or not. We know we shall never like any one else in the way that we like each other."

"Now, that is very dear and sweet of you," said Muriel, looking as miserable as a very sunny-faced little person with blue eyes and pink cheeks could look. "You see, we have never really been engaged—I mean, we have never had it put in the *Morning Post*, nor had presents given to us, nor anything of that sort. We have only just known between ourselves that we cared for each other."

"I think it is such a happy arrangement," said Tim; "and when granny dies——"

"Hush! Please don't get on to granny's death yet. I want you to give me your solemn promise that for the next—say, the next year—you won't consider yourself the least bit engaged to me, even in a private sort of way. And we won't write letters to each other, or anything."

"Then I shall have to come and live in London," said the duke, "because I can't possibly get on without seeing you or hearing from you."

"I think," said Muriel wistfully, "that it would not be wrong to let Mabel write to you sometimes."

"No," said Tim, "I don't think that would be very wrong." He was still laughing.

But when Muriel—unconsciously quoting from some romances of her schoolgirl days—said earnestly, "And everything is quite over between us," he stopped laugh-

ing, and his boyish face flushed. "Everything is *not* all over between us," he said, "and I am only giving in to granting you the promise you have asked for because I don't think it matters one hang whether we call ourselves engaged or whether we don't. We shall always care for each other—at least, I know I shall always care for you."

"Still it is a promise," persisted Muriel, as they stepped ashore.

"Oh yes, it is a promise, if you like," said the duke.

Tea was spread, and the kettle was boiling when they landed in the woods where the picnic was to take place. Every one seemed a little cross, and even Judith Campbell's good-humour had deserted her. Mr. Clifford Tarbutt had dutifully proposed to Miss M'Nab on their voyage up the river, and had been politely requested not to be so silly.

"She won't have me, mamma," he whispered to his mother, as that domineering lady was trying to apportion to the party their places round the tablecloth.

"You have mucked it, as usual, I suppose," was his mother's sole and brief reply. Her irritation caused in her an absence of mind which gave the party some chance of assorting itself in the manner more suited to the individual wishes of each. People were at last allowed to sit down where they liked, and to say what they liked, while Lady Tarbutt sat and plotted how she could obtain an invitation for the rejected Cliff to stay at that place in Midlands now rented by the heiress of the late machinist.

The Duchess of Southwark, whose country residence was some twenty miles from the scene of the picnic,

rode over on her bicycle, and found the party underneath the trees.

"I do not like picnics," she said, stooping down and frankly raising her bicycle skirt to unbutton some strap connected with its proper adjustment—"every one eats too much; but it seemed a chance of getting a little exercise."

She ate a water biscuit with evident enjoyment, and then announced that she must, without fail, go to the village and buy a bob's worth of something to take home as a memento. "Now, when all you good people have done stoking," she said, addressing the company, "let us take a run to the village shop, and buy a mug with 'A Present for a Good Girl' on it, or something of that sort. What's the good of going for a day's outing, if you do not take home a memento?"

The party, therefore, walked across the fields to the village shop, whose ceiling was hung with boots, and its windows filled with tinned meats and cheeses; and Lady Tarbutt being occupied with her own sad thoughts, stayed behind with the tea-baskets, to the relief and advantage of all concerned.

Muriel Stonor drew back, and strolled about with her brother, and the duke sat on a stile with Christina, who said to him, "I'm real vexed at you; I am 'English' vexed, not 'Scotch' vexed!"

"What is the difference?" laughed the duke.

"English vexed means cross," replied Christina, smiling, "and Scotch vexed means simply that you are grieved. I am not grieved; I am very cross."

"I am Scotch vexed," said the duke, in a tone of pleasant repartee which had not a touch of seriousness

in it ; " I am deeply, deeply grieved that we did not row up here together this afternoon."

" What time do we return ? " asked Miss M'Nab, giving his Grace so obvious an opening for suggesting that he should be her escort on the return journey, that he, being the most pliable of men, instantly did as he was bound to do.

" You will forgive me, and let me row you down to Taplow. We are going to dine there, you know, and take the train back after dinner."

Here was Christina's opportunity, and she nerved herself to profit by it. This evening in the long tender twilight on the placid river would be the time when Christina M'Nab would be invited to become a duchess. They returned to the wood to join the embarking party, but Christina kept near to her escort the whole time, and at a safe distance from Lady Tarbutt's machinations.

The duchess, meanwhile, had bought a little mug and a shell box, which she proceeded to tie on to the handle-bar of her bicycle, and then occupied herself in the interval before starting by bowling lobs at black bottles bobbing in the river. She wished to accompany the party on the first stages of their water journey, and offered to tow any boat of the number ; but she decided that she must do without the excellent exercise that this would afford, because she never liked to leave Mimsey for long. " There is no saying what stupidity he would be guilty of if left alone for many hours." They bade her " good-bye," and watched her scorching back to her home, and then, still profiting by Lady Tarbutt's absence of mind, the picnickers disposed themselves as they pleased, and rowed down to Taplow.

Christina was not one to take the initiative; she merely waited for the duke to begin.

"I am so glad you know the Stonors," he said; "they are great friends of mine." He wanted to tell his delightful, sympathetic companion of the understanding between himself and Muriel, but recollected his promise, and remained silent.

Christina also was silent; that was not the way in which a proposal of marriage began.

Again the duke lifted up his voice, and this time remarked without any overdone brilliancy of conversation, "I cannot stand that Tarbutt woman. Why, do you know her?"

"I think she is running me," said Christina simply; and the duke laughed aloud. Christina's simplicity, combined with her powers of penetration, always tickled the young man's sense of humour.

"I do not think you require much running," he said heartily; "it seems to me that everybody is running after you, and they tell me that you are turning all the fellows' heads."

"I am turning a few," said Christina complacently; "but," she added, "it is not always those I want who want me."

There was something so unanswerable about this remark, which yet seemed to invite a reply, that the duke could only smile in rather a feeble fashion, and say lamely, "I am sure everybody wants you." (The proposal was coming!)

"Do they?" said Christina. Her voice was full of encouragement.

"Well, nearly everybody," said the duke cheer-

fully, and the boyish tone was devoid of sentiment.

Christina was distinctly disappointed. She sat for some moments without speaking, and then remarked darkly, "Perhaps, when some people find out what they want, it may be too late." But the threat was too ambiguous to be very alarming, and Christina realized this. She moved impatiently in her seat, and like some mother who holds out a glittering toy to attract the admiration of a child, Christina made a laborious attempt at introducing the inspiring topic of her wealth into her conversation. "I wish I knew how to spend quite so much money all by myself," she said.

"I should think that was easy enough," said the duke gaily; "you don't care for racing, of course, but you could buy a yacht, or something jolly of that sort."

Christina rushed to the opening prepared for her. "Are you fond of yachting?" she said.

"No, I am not," said the duke frankly; "the fact is, I always get beastly sea-sick." Then what was the use of a yacht? Oh, how dense some people were!

Every one had told Christina that the Duke of Southwark must marry money, and that she—Christina M'Nab—had sufficient to support the ducal strawberry leaves. Why, therefore, this hopeless dilatoriness in settling the business? A bargain was a bargain, and Christina was waiting for what she called, in her commercial phraseology, "a firm offer."

"Some people," she said, relapsing into ambiguous terms again, "do not know when fortune lies at their feet."

"I do not see how any one can," said the duke easily.

"I mean, you never know how a thing is going to turn out. Look at granny! She has been backing wrong uns for fifty years."

"The estates must be heavily involved," said Christina eagerly.

"They are a bit dipped," acquiesced the duke; "but, after all, poor old grannie cannot keep running us into debt for ever."

"There will be heavy death-duties when your mamma dies," said Christina lugubriously.

To which his Grace responded, "Oh, I do hope my dear mother isn't going to die yet a bit!"

Another pause. "What a jolly evening it is!" said the duke, looking round him at the level green fields, and the woods beyond; "I always think an evening like this is so ripping, and I like to watch the birds and beasts and things—don't you?"

Drat the man! Had he no eyes for something ten times lovelier than the animal or vegetable world? A being with hair like a golden aureole, and offering—nay, pressing—eighteen thousand a year upon him!

Christina cleared her throat, and deliberately threaded her conversational way back to the vault and the funeral urn again. "Even if your grandmamma and your mamma were dead," she persisted, "the estates may be encumbered for a hundred years to come."

"Oh, with luck," said the duke, "we shall all be dead by that time." (The village and the river-side inn were growing nearer and nearer.)

"Don't exert yourself," said Christina, "there is no hurry."

"I am so hungry," said the duke.

"You ate a big enough tea," said Christina crossly.

The duke laughed. "Do you remember the buns that we ate in the baker's shop at Timworth?" he asked.

"Yes," said Christina joyfully, "and the supper-party at night." It was a delightful time to look back upon. "I like Timworth Castle," she said, with an attempt at sentimentality; "I should like to go back there again some day."

"I hope you will," said the young man hospitably; "I am sure we should love to have you. Is that Bunkins's boat ahead of us? and shall we pull up and row alongside of them?"

"No," said Christina, with quick decision; "you would oblige me by keeping at a distance from them."

"Poor Bunkins," said the duke humorously. The writer of plays had confessed to his friend, when allowing him to read the manuscript of his late tragedy, that the red-haired heroine who had spurned his suit was intended for Christina, and was taken from his own sad, personal experience. The duke felt sorry for Bunkins, and now tried to put in a word in his favour. "He's an awfully good chap," he said.

"Yes, yes!" said Christina impatiently; "but never mind that just now." (Only five minutes more, and the hotel would be reached!) Oh for more knowledge of the way these things were managed! Oh for Jessie's book of quotations! Oh for any power to open the eyes of a blind young man!

"I think you would be happier married," said Christina desperately.

"Oh, so do I," said the duke heartily, thinking of the lady in the white muslin gown.

Was this—could this be the beginning of a proposal ?

“ Go on,” said Christina.

“ I forget what I was talking about,” said the duke.

“ You were talking about marriage,” said the assisting voice.

“ Oh, ah, yes, about marriage. I was saying I wish I could get married.”

“ Yes,” said Christina helpfully.

“ You see, Miss M'Nab ”—she was such a dear girl, he really would like to tell her about Muriel—“ you see, Miss M'Nab, I care for some one very much, but——”

A little bouquet of flowers fell into Christina's lap. “ Hi-hi ! Hi-hi ! ” shouted some voice from the shore ; “ you are steering all wrong ; you are going right past the hotel. Hi ! dinner is ready, and you are the last to arrive. Tim, you are a lazy dog, and have not been pulling half hard enough.—That is right, Miss M'Nab ; give me your hand, and let me help you ashore. A minute more, and you would have gone past the hotel.”

“ A minute more,” thought Christina, “ and I might have been saying, ‘ yes ’ to a duke ! I must give him another opportunity.”

CHAPTER XV.

CHRISTINA meditated giving an entertainment on a large scale, and she suggested to Lady Tarbutt that it should take the form of a concert. Concerts were fashionable at present, Christina thought.

"Give a concert if you like," said the keen administrator, whom she consulted, "but there is only one way to make such an entertainment a success. Melba must sing, and you must get two Royalties, at least, to come, and screw them down into the two front chairs of your drawing-room."

Royalties being beyond Christina's scope, she suggested that she should give a ball. Lady Tarbutt heartily concurred. Her hopes of an alliance between the heiress and her son had suffered shipwreck, but there were still entertainment and profit to be derived from running millionaires. Lady Tarbutt liked to have plenty of invitations to send out, and it was a successful item at a party to be able to introduce young men to Christina, with the whispered recommendation, "She has thirty thousand a year."

"A ball would be splendid, my dear; but give us eighty-four shillings a dozen champagne, or not a living man do I ask!"

It would seem that there is a keen, business-like instinct in Society as well as in trade, but it takes a little while to conform the unaccustomed mind to this

idea. Christina promised that the champagne should cost eighty-four shillings a dozen, and Lady Tarbutt continued.

"You must hand over the whole of the invitations to me, of course," she said firmly; "I shall know best who to ask. And do not think for a moment, my dear, of being kind or hospitable, or of asking old friends. Old friends spoil a dance—that is, of course, unless you have been in Society all your life—they look dowdy, and spoil everything. Oh, my dear, I have steered so many people through the world that I know exactly how it ought to be done; and it is one of my firmest rules to have the entire distribution of invitation cards, and to exclude friends of the past."

"I have no old friends," said Christina, with spirit; "but if I had, I should certainly ask them."

"Who was that young fellow I saw in your drawing-room one day? I mean an extraordinarily good-looking person in somewhat barbaric dress," asked Lady Tarbutt, with the air of a private detective.

"Oh, that was just Colin—Colin M'Crae, that is. He is in the London Scottish," said Christina, embarrassed; "he called just to see the house, and how I was getting on. He says he is not coming back again for the present, but he has asked for the contract if I want any extra electric light for the dance."

"Oh, a tradesman, I presume?" said Lady Tarbutt.

"Yes," said Christina—"an electrical engineer."

"Excuse my saying so, my dear, but, of course, one couldn't have a person like that at your dance."

"No fear," said Christina; "Colin would not come if I asked him."

"A most sensible young man."

The following day Lady Tarbutt called with contracts and estimates—specifications from florists, *menus* from purveyors, wine lists from wine merchants, and various letters from decorators, bandmasters, and providers of all sorts.

"It is better to go to a lot of different firms," said Lady Tarbutt; "you get more *commish*. I charge you nothing, my dear, except, of course, if you like to give me my frock for the dance; but everything else is a matter of friendship and *commish*. And then afterwards I will write you up in some of the mags., and describe the dresses and their makers, and that will bring me a little bit too." (And this was one of that heavenly body called "Society," who actually despised tubes.)

Christina agreed to every item, save that of electric lighting. "I want Mr. M'Crae to see this ball," she said. "Indeed, I insist upon his seeing it; and I do not see how else I am to get him inside the doors. I should like to have everything done as magnificently as possible. And," she added mysteriously, "I have many reasons for wishing it."

To say that Christina M'Nab was complacent upon the night of her ball would be woefully to misstate the case. Christina was flushed, radiant, triumphant! She stood at the head of her staircase, clothed in one of those gowns of lily whiteness which became her so well, and with a great shower-bouquet of lilies of the valley in her hand. Her face was full of pleasure touched with gravity, which is so unusual a combination, and forms so happy an expression. Christina's smiles were rare but beautiful. With most of her guests she

merely shook hands gravely, and answered their pretty compliments with that touch of seriousness in her low voice which every one found so charming. All were busy using gushing phrases about the decorations, the floor, the lights. Christina believed, with all her native sincerity, that those who admired must find things admirable, and her pretty acceptance of compliments—"It is very kind of you to say so"—was almost a reproof to those whose compliments meant nothing at all. A constant stream of people ascended the broad staircase, whose walls were entirely draped with some purest white soft Indian material, and looped up at intervals with loose bunches of long-stemmed English roses. The crush in the hall downstairs was as satisfactory as it could possibly be. It atoned for a lady's annoyance at finding her dress crushed and trodden upon to realize that she had come to the right sort of party, where everybody was to be seen, and everything was well done.

Very smart and very young men with the impertinence of their kind approved of Christina's arrangements with a patronizing air, and brainless boys whom Christina's shrewdness would have exposed in five minutes remarked "that as a matter of strong necessity they would be obliged to make a bid for the M'Nab! Every profession in England was so full at present, and the Colonies were beastly. There was really nothing for a poor fellow to do but to marry some woman who would keep him decently and respectably." Certainly all that section of society whom Lady Tarbutt called "the right people" had come to the dance in Grosvenor Square. Lady Tarbutt said to herself that the whole thing was one of the smartest and the most successful

affair she had ever arranged. The only man in England who could lead a cotillon to perfection had placed his services at Miss M'Nab's disposal. ("Do not give handsome presents," Lady Tarbutt had commanded, "it is so like beer!" so the presents were tasteful but not expensive.)

The band in a flower-garlanded recess of the ballroom gave forth sweet music; discarded chaperons no longer occupied their much-grudged benches round the walls of the room; and only a few very young girls—who are, of course, impossible people at a modern ball—found themselves without partners. That the dancing was merely a romp need not, of course, be denied; but it was an enjoyable romp, and the older the ladies were who participated in it the livelier seemed their energy and the greater their enjoyment. Matrons who played hockey during the week, biked, and rode to hounds, could not be expected to take their pleasures quietly, and they danced with tireless energy the whole of the evening.

All our old friends were at the ball. Judith Campbell with Captain Stonor, her latest and most impecunious young man, looked radiant. Lilah Anstruther, insufferably lady-like, but sweet and charming all the time, was surrounded by partners to whom her quiet good manners were always attractive. Mr. Drummond was in a state of enjoyment bordering upon frenzy, and Anne—chaperoning Lady Muriel Stonor, whose sister was unable to come—tried to arrange partners for every wall-flower. Alice Maynard, now a bride, looked very blushing and girlish in a simple white frock. She unbent with matronly condescension to young men

with whom formerly Alice said "it was necessary to be so careful," and made coy advances towards them under the protecting shelter of her husband's wing. Alice enjoyed being addressed by old acquaintances, who had not heard of her marriage, as "Miss Maynard," and she corrected their mistake with a delightful smile, saying, "Mrs. West, now, *please!*" And then followed explanations and congratulations entirely after Alice's heart. Bunkins had now fallen hopelessly in love with Christina, and bitterly regretted his premature courtship of the girl. "If I had only not been such a blundering, bumptious ass," he used to say sadly, "I might really have had a chance." Mr. Venables was deep in a love affair with the elder Miss Lumley, and Lord Hardcastle was at the ball, and Miss Greville too.

Miss Greville was a distinct personality. She was twenty-eight years of age, dark and beautiful. She had come to the ball very late, knowing, with that sort of magnificent insolence that suited her so admirably, that when she appeared every man in the room would do his best to obtain the pleasure of dancing with her, and every woman would say, "Miss Greville has come!" She sailed through a few dances in her superb way, and was now preparing to sail out again. Lord Hardcastle helped her on with her cloak—a magnificent cloak of white satin, stiff with embroidery and lined with sable—and as with reverent touch he put the costly mantle upon her shoulders, and they stood together in the anteroom, he said courteously, in his high-bred voice, "I must say good-bye, Beatrice; I shall not see you again for a time." He spoke in his level, pleasant

tones; and Miss Greville looked sharply at him, and said, speaking with a cold disdain, "Has the heiress refused you, Barny?"

"No," said Lord Hardcastle; "I have not asked her to marry me, as you know."

"Well, good-bye. Is it to be bear-shooting this time, or lion-hunting?"

Barny laughed. "It is a polar expedition this time," he said lightly. "I do not find that bear-shooting and lion-hunting do me much good."

"What sort of good?" asked Beatrice.

"They don't cure me of loving you," said Barny simply.

"So now it is to be frozen out of you," laughed Beatrice. She was so tall that her face was on a level with her lover's, and the nearness of it, the brilliance and superabundance of it, were intoxicating, and it made a man feel light-headed for a moment, and Lord Hardcastle's cheeks suddenly flamed.

"Poor old Barny," said Beatrice.

"So good-bye," said Barnabas.

"Good-bye!"

The lights flared overhead, and the music sounded riotously from the ballroom above. There was no one in the anteroom but these two—the tall woman, with her shimmering ivory satin cloak falling about her, and the man with the haggard face.

"Your carriage is at the door, ma'am," said a footman.

And they went out together down the strip of carpet and between the lines of poorly-clad folk who had come to hang about the pavement and see the ladies in their

brave dresses go by. He put her into her carriage without another word, and shut the door, and Beatrice drove away. "God help me!" muttered Barnabas. Still the dancers danced indefatigably, and the fiddles scraped and twanged, and couples went to supper in pairs, and sat out in recesses, and talked very loud because every one else was talking and they had to be heard above the din. And Lord Hardcastle watched it all and heard it all like a man in a dream.

Christina's duty of shaking hands with arriving guests was now over, and she had accepted some invitations to dance, when Judith, flying downstairs alone, caught her and drew her aside. "I am the happiest girl in the world," she whispered. "Do kiss me and tell me you adore me. Every one *must* adore me to-night because Thomas does. He proposed to me this evening, and we are going to be married directly."

Christina had heard something of the affair, and exclaimed, "Has he been through the Bankruptcy Court?"

"No," cried Judith, delighted; "but his uncle says that he will never, never pay his debts again. He has not a penny beside his pay, and I have only a hundred and fifty pounds a year of my own; and we are going to live in lodgings at Portsmouth, and be happy for ever and ever. Amen."

Christina gave her hearty congratulations, and then Judith, overflowing with good nature, linked her arm in Christina's with a happy girlish confidence, and inquired, "Has the duke proposed to you yet? Please don't mind my asking, but I want every one to be as happy as I am, and, of course, one can see that he adores you."

Christina looked pleased. "He has not actually declared himself yet," she said, "but I believe he will do so very soon. I think he was interrupted one evening on the river when he meant to say more."

"Try that little recess on the staircase," whispered Judith, laughing; "no one seems to have found it out. Thomas and I were there for an hour, and it was heavenly!"

At this moment the duke came out of the ballroom in an eager search for his partner. His face wore its usual healthy appearance and delighted smile; and boy that he was, he entreated Christina to come at once and not lose a bar of "Santiago."

"If you please," said Christina, "I should prefer to go and sit in the little recess on the staircase."

Judith, brimful of happiness, whispered in her ear as she passed, "Best congratulations! There now, I have been the first to wish you happiness."

And Christina and the duke passed onwards upstairs. Christina told his Grace the happy news concerning her girl friend and Captain Stonor.

"You don't say so!" cried the young fellow, delighted. That two young people were going to be married was in itself an entirely delightful and happy state of things, whether they were going to live in Portsmouth or on the Gold Coast of South Africa. "That's a splendid piece of news," he said. "Fancy old Tom Stonor, Muriel's brother, going to be married! Well, I only wish I had half his luck; it would make me very happy, I know."

And then Christina answered in suitable terms. With modesty, but also with warmth, she told his Grace that she was not surprised at receiving his dec-

laration, because she had expected it for some time; that she would be pleased to bestow upon him this luck which he had declared would make him happy: and having sat for some ten minutes more by the side of a perfectly speechless and horror-stricken young man, she remarked that she must now return to the ballroom and look after her guests. And the Duke of Southwark, a moderate and abstemious young man by nature, found his way to the supper-room and asked Christina's butler for a very strong brandy-and-soda.

Judith Campbell raised her eyebrows, and sent a glance of interrogation across the whole length of the ballroom when Christina entered the doorway; and having received one single comprehensive nod of assent, the news of Miss M'Nab's engagement soon spread through the ballroom.

"Have you heard about it?" Judith cried, dancing up to Anne Drummond, and whirling away from her partner's arm for a moment, to impart the happy news to her friend, who stood with Muriel Stonor by her side.

"Yes, indeed, I have," replied Anne, smiling. "Thomas was not able to keep his happy secret very long, and told it to Muriel, who has just been telling it to me."

"Thomas's secret!" cried Judith, with a joyful laugh. "Why, that stale old secret," giving a laughing glance at Captain Stonor, "is quite eclipsed by Christina's engagement."

"Christina—Christina engaged? Who——" Quite instinctively she drew a little nearer Muriel Stonor, and checked her desire to put her hand round the little creature's waist.

"She is engaged to Tim," said Muriel, in a sharp, quick, low voice; "please don't tell us about it. You really need not, Judith."

And Judith, too happy to notice anything at all, floated away on her partner's arm again.

"You are not going to faint?" said Anne quickly. "Shall I take you out on to the balcony? Muriel dear, please keep up."

"I am going to keep up," said Muriel, in a steady voice, although the poor little face was very white. "I am very glad that Tim is going to marry Miss M'Nab; I advised him to do so. Still, still"—the underlip trembled—"I think I should like to go home now, if you don't mind. O Anne, why are people looking at me so?"

"You are looking a little white," said Anne. "Come to the dressing-room, and I will find Dickie, and we shall take you home."

Mr. Drummond had not ceased dancing for five minutes since he entered the ballroom, and he was now enjoying a galop. "I cannot go home yet, Anne; really I can't," he exclaimed on getting his wife's summons. He was just like a schoolboy begging for a little longer holiday.

But Anne said quickly, "Please come and get us into the carriage, Dickie; I must take Muriel home. Something so dreadful has happened. Tim has proposed to Christina M'Nab, and she has accepted him!"

"Well, come now," said Dickie; "I really think that is the best bit of news I have heard for a long time. Both as nice as they can be. Tim, a pauper; Christina, an heiress—it seems to me so extremely

suitable all round. As for that affair with Muriel, you know it never really was an engagement; and if it had been, it never could have been a marriage. So——”

“I think she is heart-broken,” said Anne.

“Heart-broken!” quoth Dickie; “oh, what nonsense! I mean, my dear Anne, to be heart-broken about Tim. By George, I am very sorry to hear it! Perhaps we ought never to have had him to stay at Popples. I believe that was all my fault; at least, if it wasn’t my fault, it was the first time that I have not been the cause of a disaster of this sort happening. It may kill that poor child, and then we shan’t have another happy moment so long as we both live. I feel like a murderer. Let’s find Miss M’Nab and say ‘good-night,’ and then take that unfortunate little girl home; and to-morrow we might call and ask Christina to break it off with Tim.” He began to bustle about looking for his hostess, and muttering in a perfectly audible whisper, “If anything happens, her death will lie at our door. Perhaps I might get a word with Miss M’Nab to-night, and entreat her to let this unhappy young man off his engagement. But then, Christina might be just as unhappy as Muriel, and what should we do then? If she marries, our only paying guest is gone, and the pigsties not paid for yet. But I will not think of myself or my own troubles during a tragedy of this sort. If the pigsties have to be pulled down and sold brick by brick, I cannot help it. Perhaps she will give us a quarter’s salary in lieu of notice, as the tradespeople say; but then, of course, I couldn’t take it.” He almost ran against Christina while still muttering

and pursuing his distracted search. "I must go," he said solemnly; "this has been a dreadful evening."

Dickie's remarks were so often enigmatical that Christina did not notice the unusualness of his mode of thanking her for an evening's entertainment. She begged him not to go yet, and remarked that the co-tillon was just about to begin.

"I am afraid my pram has come for me," said Dickie solemnly; "I am much afraid my pram has come for me."

"Your pram surely might wait for a little bit," said Christina's partner to him.

"My pram," began Dickie again, for the third time—then clutching his hair with both his hands he ran downstairs.

"Dickie is madder than ever," said Christina's partner.

The Drummonds and Lady Muriel drove home together to the Dundases' house, where they were all staying; and Dickie's form of consolation to the little girl, who like a broken flower drooped in the corner of the big carriage, was to make repeated indeed incessant demands as to her state of comfort.

"Sure you are not cold—quite sure? Not hungry? Did you have some supper? I must say the supper was excellent, in spite of Christina's infamous behaviour. I must say I like the girl immensely; and if the whole thing was to happen over again, I really do not see that we could improve upon it: still, it is all very disastrous and terrible! Quite sure you like the window down? Really not cold?"

The fact that neither of the ladies encouraged his

conversation did not prevent Mr. Drummond from babbling on in this fashion till they reached the door of the Dundases' house, when, with almost pathetic solicitude, he lifted the half-fainting Muriel bodily from the carriage, and carried her straight up to her bedroom.

The cotillon was kept on till four o'clock in the morning, and various figures, graceful or childish, were performed with enjoyment and skill by the dancers. Perhaps no one went through the figures more gracefully than Lord Hardcastle, and no one noticed that he was graver than usual.

The Duke of Southwark said good-night to Christina before the final dance began, and walked home with his heart as heavy as lead, and his eyes seeing nothing but the white face of Muriel Stonor. "I suppose it will kill her," he was saying to himself, with the over-despondency of the young, "and I wish it would kill me too! Is there no getting out of it? Half the people in the room to-night congratulated me. I am glad the Drummonds took her home; my sister will look after her. Of course, *she* knew; and I do not know how the rest of the world never guessed. Muriel is just out; I have no doubt they told each other in their wooden-headed way that a schoolroom flirtation never counts. Schoolroom flirtation indeed! I have cared for her ever since she was a little girl in white frocks in the nursery." The servant who admitted him asked him kindly "if he wouldn't have nothing?" and Tim replied, "No, no; my good fellow, don't bother," speaking, almost for the first time in his life, without the sound of a laugh in his voice or the look of a smile on his face.

And so Christina's ball ended. The last supper was eaten, and the last valse was danced. The sleepy cabmen who had waited all night in the square, and had watched the night die and the day dawn to the sound of the fiddle and the beat of dancing feet, now got down stiffly from their boxes and removed the nose-bags from their horses' heads ready for the summoning whistle from the lackeys at the door.

Ladies in satin and tulle tripped down the strip of carpet under the awning, with the clean early-morning sunshine blazing down upon them, and young men in light overcoats lit up cigarettes and strolled home. The musicians with their fiddle-cases under their arms drank their last glass of champagne, and a footman banging a carriage-door said, "Well, I suppose that is the last," and rolled up the strip of carpet on the doorstep. The electric lights in the balcony at which the daylight mocked were switched off, and a tall young man with tumbled yellow curls, having carefully manipulated wires, sent his workmen home, and came into the empty ballroom, where candles still flamed in their sockets, and the sun, strong and bright, stole in through the curtained windows.

To him a very tired girl, with a light of triumph in her eyes, came and said, "Good-night, Colin; I suppose you have heard the news?"

"Yes," said Colin, "and I do not think I was ever so proud of you in all my life before."

"I just hate you!" said Christina.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE engagement of the young Duke of Southwark to Miss M'Nab was the topic of conversation during the rest of the London season, so that people meeting each other at parties or in the Row would say—knowing the news already to be generally known—"I suppose you have heard about Tim?" to which the other would reply, "Yes," and then proceed to state Christina's income, and in a secondary sort of way to expatiate upon her beauty. The subject was almost as severely thrashed out as the matter of bulbs had been in the country. Persons who felt a little insecure about receiving an invitation to *the* wedding of the season—which was to take place towards the end of July—began to send handsome presents to the bride-elect, and cordial congratulations. And those whose invitations were a certainty showered inexpensive tokens of their esteem upon "dear Christina." No one noticed that Lady Muriel Stonor had not appeared at any of the parties that took place in June, and no one missed her. She was so young, had been out such a little while that she had hardly individualized in the London world, and her very tiny stature made her as little remarkable as her own gentle nature could desire. Perhaps only Anne Drummond knew how the poor child's pillow was wet with tears at night, and how the little fragile figure shook with sobs when Muriel fancied herself alone.

Anne was infinitely distressed, but said nothing. Dickie's impetuosity might have led him to do something that was rash and impulsive; and Muriel's own wish was a prayerful entreaty that Anne should "be nice" to her brother, and applaud his engagement to Miss M'Nab. Only once, as they sat in the Park one summer evening in the cool refreshing hour before dinner, did the young people meet each other and have a few words together. Then Anne, discreet chaperon though she was, hastily rose from her chair where she was sitting, saying, "Keep my chair for a few minutes, Tim; I want to speak to some people over there," and walked away across the lawn to some distant chairs.

"I must speak to you," said Tim suddenly; "I cannot go on like this. I don't think it is a bit disloyal to Christina, for I never meant it, Muriel. It is all some awful mistake, and I can't even think how it happened."

"I am going away," said Muriel, speaking in the inconsecutive way that lovers have when some tragedy has overthrown their happiness—not answering each other's questions, nor daring to be explicit, but merely clinging to some remorseless fact, such as, "I am going away," or "Papa won't hear of it; we are much too poor."

"Don't go," said the duke, boyishly eager to avoid the pain of immediate separation.

"It is much wiser that I should. You know, dear"—speaking with the wisdom of ages which distinguishes the very young—"it is the woman who must be wise on these occasions, and"—breaking down a little—"I know I must go, Tim; I know I must go."

"This is pretty ghastly," said the duke, and his tone was so tragic that the absolute slanginess of his expression did not sound absurd.

"I did not mean to say anything," said Muriel; "I meant to go away without seeing you. Do you mind leaving me now, Tim? I don't think I can bear this any longer."

He went obediently, and fetched his sister, saying he was obliged to go home. Muriel was keeping her chair for her; he was sorry he must run away, but he had an engagement.

"Such," said the lady who was speaking to Anne, "is the chronic condition of young men in the duke's circumstances. I suppose your brother is always engaged now, Lady Anne?"

"We don't see very much of him, it is true," said Anne sadly. It was so evident from her brother's expression that her little attempt at forwarding an explanation with Muriel had not been successful. "If only Christina loved him," thought Anne, with as much impatience as her gentle nature could feel, "I shouldn't mind in the least—at least, I should only mind a little; but she does not care for him a bit—I know she doesn't."

Muriel Stonor was taken to St. Moritz for "nerves;" and the Drummonds returned to Popples, where, at Whitsuntide, Miss M'Nab followed them. Christina grudged even a day away from London, but all her friends told her that London was impossible at Whitsuntide; and with the herding instinct which applies even to the higher animals, the world of town moved down into the country for a week, and Christina moved

with them. The duke himself took her down to Popples ; which highly delighted her.

"Folk may say what they like about simple pleasures," said Christina to herself, as the train bore her and her *fiancé* through the flat English shire, the whole landscape a billowy softness of trees and green fields, with pleasant little villages here and there planted round some tiny village church—"folk may say what they like about simple pleasures, but until you are engaged to a duke you hardly know what pleasure is. And people who pretend to love only green fields, and all that, cannot have experienced London in the season, with eighteen thousand a year."

The duke appeared in low spirits, but was courteous and pleasant, as he ever was. His depression, however, did not communicate itself to his companion, nor cause her even the least feeling of resentment. "He's new to it," reflected Christina, "and he does not care about the situation much as yet ; but then, of course, you can't have everything ! After all, suitability is the great thing. He will have his comforts with me, which he has never had before ; and I will have position, and that is a solid advantage, wrestle with it as you like." She did not bore her lover by shouting remarks to him above the roar of the train, but sat demurely looking out at the flying beauty of the landscape, and enjoying every moment of the journey.

At Hoeford Station there was a surprise in store for the young couple. Mrs. Weeks, wreathed in smiles and clad in her best dress, held a reluctant Miss Weeks by the hand, and dragging her forward induced her to present a large bouquet of common garden flowers, tied

with white ribbon, to the future bride. The stolid child handed the bunch of stocks, sweet-williams, and Canterbury bells to the astonished Christina, who nevertheless felt there was something a little regal in the proceeding, and gravely thanked the little girl for her gift.

"Babbah bade me give it," said Miss Weeks, who was suffering from what her mamma described as "one of their summer colds."

Mrs. Weeks kissed Christina on both cheeks before she was well out of the carriage, and began a series of bright remarks which were distinctly audible all over the station.

"I always knew how it would be! I said so from the first! Willie and I had a bet upon the subject."

"We had no bet," interposed Mr. Weeks.

"You darling old stupid," said Mrs. Weeks, in a voice of annoyance, "do not be so exact!"

"I must tell the truth," responded Mr. Weeks, in a firm voice; "I owe it to my office and to my cloth."

"Is not he a dear old frump!" exclaimed Mrs. Weeks gaily; and she went down the platform with Christina, chatting all the time.

"I have such heaps to tell you that has happened since you have been away! I don't think we have ever had a more lively summer—garden-parties nearly every day——"

"O Babbah——"

"—And the Flower Show, besides a very pleasant little gathering when we had the tombstones of the churchyard scraped and put up straight."

She led the conversation in her voluble way till the

carriage was reached, and Christina and the duke drove off, followed by the admiring eyes of the stationmaster and his staff and the whole village. The duke touched his hat, and Christina bowed, with a heart swelled with pride.

Poplar's Court looked beautiful in the afternoon sunshine. It is extraordinary the dignity of these old houses, surrounded by their private parks, and with a stone wall—either actually or metaphorically—between them and the outside world. They are some of the unvulgar things that are left in England; and when they have been sold to the rich and to the vulgar, and when railways have screamed close to the house, and rights of way have been established on every side, we shall lose not only some of the best and sincerest pleasures of living, but we shall lose also much of the dignity and the beauty of life. The lodgekeeper bobbed to Christina, taking a fresh look at her as the affianced of the young duke, and so it had been on every side. In London it had been the fashion to turn round and stare at Miss M'Nab; no one seemed to think it rude, and even in church a whisper had been used to go about, "Do you see that pretty girl with red hair? She is the Duke of Southwark's *fiancée*!"

There was no house-party at Popples. Indeed, Judith Campbell was the only guest. Even Christina was a little tired after her many gaieties, and when Anne had asked her if there were any friends whom she would like to meet at Whitsuntide, she had replied in the negative. Surely, when a duke is secured, a girl may rest.

Anne came smiling to the doorway to greet Christina.

She could never be anything but courteous and gracious to every one, especially to the girl who had lived with them all so amiably, who had been so little exacting as a guest, and who now was to be her brother's wife. Mr. Drummond accepted the inevitable with his usual optimism, and had decided that everything was for the best, as it usually was in this best of all possible worlds, and the Whitsuntide visit to Popples began most pleasantly. Judith Campbell was in more than usually radiant spirits, having at last gained her father's consent to her marriage.

"How did you manage it?" asked Anne, laughing. "I was afraid your father would be very difficult to manage." She turned to Dickie, and said softly, "Do you remember the troubles we went through before we were allowed to marry?"

"Ah, that was because you are not modern," said Judith.

"I am afraid I was born a little old-fashioned," replied Anne. "Please tell us how papas ought to be managed."

"Oh, father was as obdurate as could be at first," said Judith; "so I did not press the matter in the least, but waited with wily craft for a fair opportunity, and then asked him to dine with me at my club. Papa, you know, who is old-fashioned—or thinks he is, which comes to the same thing—thought all along that I was going to be tearful, like girls in books, or even abusive—I really think, sometimes, that father thought I was going to be abusive—but I was perfectly cheerful and polite, which was a pleasant surprise to him every day. Well, then, one night mamma was going to a

meeting, and wanted papa to go with her. I saw his look of anguish, dutifully veiled for mamma's sake, and said, 'I did hope, papa, that you might have been able to dine with me at my club to-night.' He said, 'I should like it of all things, if your mamma does not mind.' So then we had a very nice little dinner and some really excellent champagne, and after dinner we smoked cigarettes. You know what a feeling of equality that gives, and how much men object to it for this very reason; however, papa could not very well say anything when I was his hostess, and really we had a very cosy little time. And at last I said with a big, a most manly, a most sensible puff of my cigarette, 'You know, dear papa, that I mean to marry Thomas Stonor.' And he said, 'I am perfectly aware of that fact.' I remarked, 'He is a dear boy.' And papa said, 'He is a monstrous bad match.' Of course papa expected me to be furious; but all I said was, 'He is, indeed, dear papa.' So that rather cut the ground from under his feet. And of course he relented directly. Coffee arrived at this critical moment, and papa looked so mellow and delightful, and remarked, 'You will make a charming wife, my dear.' I said, 'Yes, I think I shall;' and we went on to the theatre together afterwards, with everything settled happily, and without any fuss. I am so glad I am a modern girl!"

There was a good deal of laughter over Judith's nonsense, and the evening passed so pleasantly that hardly any one noticed the duke's low state of mind. He was punctilious in the discharge of every courtesy towards Christina, and waited upon her at every hour

of the day to know if she would like to walk or drive, or see this or that—a most exemplary *fiancé* indeed ! But when Judith left to pay another visit the days at Popples were a little tedious, not to say gloomy, and only Anne Drummond's unvarying sweetness and unselfishness, and her unflagging efforts to make everything pleasant, availed to prevent the time feeling unaccountably long. Fortunately, Anne's spirits were never of an effervescent sort. The mild radiance that shone from her kind face burned with a steady light, and was not accustomed either to flare up suddenly or to go out altogether. She was one of those delightful people whose humour—as well as whose every action—was based upon a real desire to do the right thing. Anne Drummond may have made some mistakes sometimes, but her motive was always good. It is doubtful whether she desired anything in life but to love, and, in her own simple phraseology, “to be good.”

“The difference between Anne and me,” Dick used to say in his most sapient manner, “is this : I always do everything from a wrong principle, because I think it is the only way to make disagreeable things tolerable. Now Anne always does them from a right principle, and enjoys disagreeable things for the very reason which would make me hate them.”

It was a matter of daily indecision with her at present whether she should say anything to Christina which would open her eyes to the fact that the duke was unhappy, not to say really broken-hearted. It seemed too late to interfere, and yet how sad that two lives should be spoilt, while a third surely—in spite of many advantages—could not altogether be happy. Her

promise to Muriel forbade that she should disclose the secret of her love for Tim ; but surely, in general terms, Anne might speak to Christina about the emptiness of a loveless match, and try and find out definitely whether she really loved her future husband or not, and thus allay her own fears and anxieties. Always the shyest of women and the most backward in giving counsel, Lady Anne waited while the days passed without an opportunity for speaking, except on the most ordinary topics, to her guest. How could she advise any one who, it must be said, never sought advice nor seemed to need it ? How even discourse upon serious matters without seeming to preach ? Words cost so much, and were so difficult of utterance !

One long hot day, when the fierceness of the sun had prevented any outdoor exercise, when the duke lay in the hammock in the breeze, and smoked many cigarettes, and only the unquenchable energy of Dick and Joan could withstand that torpor which such heat produces, Lady Anne and Christina, who had been indoors during the whole afternoon, came out and sat on the broad green terrace upon which the side-windows of the drawing-room opened, and had tea brought to them within the shadow of the house. The lawn was surrounded by the low dark stone wall of the moat, upon whose waters the lower branches of fir trees on the opposite side rested with a quiet content, and across which two bright-hued kingfishers flashed backwards and forwards in the sun. Christina seated herself in a low basket-chair, with a big white satin cushion behind her head ; the blush-rose colour of her cheek looked warm against the creamy white of the pillow, and the beautiful copper-coloured

hair with its burnished waves formed a halo round her head. A big diamond ring flashed upon her finger, and the small white hand lay cool and idle upon the gray linen of Christina's lap. The moment was one of calm contentment and enjoyment. The duke, called from his hammock and his cigarettes, waited upon her with every attention that the tea-table demanded ; and Mr. Drummond's chatter was a pleasant accompaniment to the homely clinking of the tea-cups.

"Wake up ! wake up !" cried Dickie ; "wake up, Tim !—Tim is now sleeping the sleep of repletion, and I insist upon his getting up and taking a walk before dinner-time."

"Your energy is appalling," said Tim, getting up and stretching himself lazily.—"Are you to be allowed to sleep, Christina ? or will you come with us ?"

Christina thought it was pleasanter to sit upon the shady lawn, and declined the proffered exercise. But presently she and Anne, having seen the gentlemen depart across the moat bridge, strolled down the lime walk together. The trees met far above them, like the lofty arches of a great cathedral ; and a lake shimmered at the end of the stately walk.

"How beautiful such evenings as these are !" said Anne. "I hope you are beginning to love the country, Christina—at least in summer-time."

"I always said," replied Christina, "the country was very well in its own place and at the right time."

"This is my favourite time of all the day," went on the gentle voice, as Anne passed slowly down the lime walk, with the verdant arches overhead. "It always seems to me that God still walks in a garden in the cool

of the day, the place seems so full of Him, and of beauty, at this hour."

Christina was silent. She considered Anne's thought a beautiful one, but a little oppressive. There are times when a worldly young woman does not particularly desire to feel constantly in the presence of her Creator.

"We are so happy here, Dickie and I and Joan," said Anne, "that I want everybody to be as happy as we are. You know, Christina, I feel as though I had never said half enough in the way of congratulation; but you know, don't you, dear, how much I wish you and Tim every happiness?"

"I am sure you do," said Christina impulsively; "you have always been sweet to me."

The kindly expression made Anne flush slightly, but gave her courage to proceed. "Judith says I am a very old-fashioned person," she said, "and I suppose I am; but to me it seems that love is everything—it makes all one's happiness. And so I think that whatever happens, if married people love each other, nothing can ever be really very disturbing or very sad."

"Do you think love is everything?" said Christina.

"Indeed I do," said Anne warmly; "but then, as I told you, I am very old-fashioned. I think it is even better to love as John Churchill did than not to love at all."

"It has made a very unhappy life for Mr. Churchill," said Christina conclusively.

"We always think," said Anne, "although we never talk about it, that he still loves Miss Villiers, and always will love her; so, though his whole career seemed to end in disaster, he never sacrificed his ideals."

There was a tender influence over everything this evening, a softening atmosphere—a feeling in the air like Sunday evening, when the lights are low and the children are singing hymns. Old memories crowd thickly upon us then, and forgotten aspirations rise like ghosts and flit before us; old opportunities, old loves, thoughts of long ago crowd upon us, and according as we have lived, so do we love this hour or so do we resent it. Christina resented it, and struggled against the influence of the cathedral-like lime walk and Anne's dear goodness. She was relieved when she saw Tim and Dick return from their walk. She cried a little when she had gone to bed at night, and wished that she were back in London again.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE next day Dick was paying an afternoon visit to John Churchill's room, and said to him, "That old fool Brown seems to be coming to see you pretty often just now, John?"

"Yes," replied John, smiling; "and he brought another old fool to see me to-day, Dickie."

"Why should he do that?" said Mr. Drummond resentfully. "Why does he keep on poking his nose in here when he is not asked? You are as well as ever you were in your life, John, since you had that nasty spill; so why should he keep bothering round? He is hard up, I suppose. There is nothing to do down here except doctor the Weekses' colds, so he is trying to fleece you. Brute!"

John only smiled again, and Dick went on wrathfully,—

"They all want to make you out an invalid, just because the hot weather has tried you a bit; as if every one did not feel rather a rag in such blazing heat as this! Who was the other old blighter who came to see you to-day?"

"He was Dr. ——," said John.

"A London swell?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't see the use of it," burst out Dickie. "Why, man, they will persuade you that you are a

chronic invalid next ! What is all this nonsense about your being in such bad health ? It was colder certainly last winter than we often have it, and it is certainly hotter this summer ; but I really don't see——”

John was still smiling a little, and he crossed the room and put his arm round his friend's shoulder, and said, “ Dickie, I have had notice to quit.”

“ Not quit this house ! ” exclaimed Dick ; “ not after all these years ! We'll, what do you mean ? O John—John, old chap, you can't mean *that* ! ”

“ Do you think you would mind telling Anne ? ” said John Churchill. “ Please do not mind so much, Dickie,” for Dick Drummond was sobbing like a child.

The kingfishers flashed across the moat, and Joan's voice could be heard shouting happily from the garden, and the afternoon's sunshine was turning everything to gold : it seemed very hard to Dick that his old friend should have to leave all this. “ I don't believe it,” he began again, but John checked him.

“ I have a week or two still,” he said. “ Do you mind saying nothing about me till the wedding is over ? ”

He limped down to the hall the following morning to bid the parting guests good-bye, teasing Christina a little with his quiet, sad humour, and then suddenly becoming grave, and wishing her earnestly every possible blessing.

The tears of which Christina was always so heartily ashamed, and which few people had ever seen, were very near her eyes that morning. The visit to Popples had been a little depressing, she thought, and yet what more did she want ? Tim had been charming, and

Anne kind and loving; but perhaps they had a more serious way of looking at things than London people had, and it would be pleasant to get back to the rush and whirl of the season again. Every one had something kind to say to her as she bade them good-bye. Anne kissed her fondly, saying, "Till the great day, Christina dear!" Dickie said, "You will never know what a good thing matrimony is until you are in trouble;" which seemed an inexplicable remark. And Joan hung about her neck, kissing her, and making shrewd little remarks composed of gushing childish phrases and masculine slang.

Christina, standing at the hall door with the carriage waiting for her, cried, "I have forgotten something," and ran up to John Churchill's room. "Mr. Churchill," she cried, "I cannot say it, but I want you to thank them all for being so kind to me. And you will get well quickly, won't you, and come to my wedding?"

"I shall get well very quickly," said John, smiling; and Christina ran downstairs again.

She returned to London, where business of all sorts awaited her, from the ordering of the trousseau to the disposition of her affairs and the arranging of the wedding-party. As the time drew near for the marriage Colin was busy arranging settlements. The commercial spirit was strong in Colin, and no stern guardian, no grasping father was ever more particular than this young man was to tie up Christina's money securely for her. "Duke or no duke," he remarked, "I am going to see that your money is safe." And he took laudable pains to ensure that this should be so. Trustees had to be found, and he and Lord Hardcastle consented to

act in this capacity. Six o'clock in the evening, when Colin's work was over, was the hour chosen for business conferences ; and at six o'clock the two gentlemen were generally to be found in the big, cool library of Christina's house. One would sit on either side of the leather-covered table, while Christina—white-gowned and golden-haired—sat between them, conducting her business with composure and admirable skill. The days were long and hot this fine weather, but in the dim library, at the north side of the spacious house, it was always cool and pleasant. Colin would tie up documents in a very business-like way, and direct Christina's signature ; and Lord Hardcastle, watching the two heads bent over some paper, was struck afresh each time by the beauty of both. Why had they not fallen in love with each other in the old Lumboro' days ?

“ I am quite sure,” he said to himself, “ had I been Christina, I could not have resisted that good-looking young giant ; nor could I, had I been Colin, have been proof against Christina's beauty, if I had not known the only other woman in the world who is more beautiful ! ” A sharp pain passed through him—a sudden darting pain such as an old wound sometimes gives when we least expect it ; and Lord Hardcastle saw suddenly before him, not only his long, lonely voyage to an ice-bound land, with only the memory of a woman to be with him under the stars of a frosty night, but that other and longer voyage which we call life, which appeared to him then so interminable, so cold, and so lonely. He pulled himself together as tea was brought into the room, and said to Christina, “ You spoil us, you

know. We come here—M'Crae and I—on the plea of doing work for you, instead of which we eat strawberries and cream and waste your time."

"I am afraid I waste your time" said Christina. "You must be very busy just now, and I fear this business intrudes upon your own occupations."

"I am afraid I shall not be able to come again," said Lord Hardcastle, "for I really have got a good deal to do; but there is not much more to settle. Mr. M'Crae will get the other documents from the lawyer to-morrow or the next day, and he has promised to bring them on to me for my signature."

So Colin and Christina worked alone on the following day and the next, and the one that followed that.

Now this is the history of the first day:—

"You are quieter than you used to be," said Colin to Christina, during a pause for tea and strawberries.

"It is more befitting a married lady," said Christina gravely.

Colin threw back his head and laughed in his delightful way. "You are not married yet," he said.

"I am just four weeks off it."

"Is that all?" said Colin. "I have hardly reckoned that there was so little time left. Well, we ought to get on with this business," reseating himself at the table.

"You don't think I am too quiet?" said Christina. "Tim himself was talking of it the other day, and said that he and I were a quiet couple."

"You are not a bit too quiet," said Colin kindly; "indeed, I prefer it to what you used to be. There was whiles when I used to think you talked too much."

"You were always one to find fault," said Christina sharply; and a little angry sob came up into her voice, and prevented her saying much more that she wanted to say.

"Well, now, about these shares," said Colin briskly: "do you feel inclined to buy them at par?" And they talked of business until seven o'clock; that was the end of the first day. And that was the whole of its history.

On the following afternoon Christina said, "Talk about being quiet, Colin! it is yourself that has been looking very white this long while back."

"So they say," said Colin cheerfully; "and I understand that it suits my cast of features."

"Are you well enough?" said Christina softly. There was at this time in her heart a curious spring of pity which she did not well know where to apply. Pity was not required for her happy, fortunate self, nor, certainly, was it required for her happy and fortunate duke; but it was there, all the same, and caused what she called "a lump in her throat." Perhaps it might be bestowed upon Colin.

"I am well enough," replied Colin, with his usual cheerfulness; "but I am sitting up late at nights now, working at that new lamp I am making."

"It is going to be a great invention, isn't it?" said Christina.

"Yes," said Colin simply, "a good one, I think; and," he added, "when I have made my name and my fortune, I mean to ask you and the duke to a lot of grand parties."

Christina's pity was evidently thrown away and

not required, and the annoyance that this waste of good material engenders in even the best-intentioned persons disturbed Miss M'Nab's temper so considerably that she said with a wrathful flush, "It is often a surprise to me, Colin M'Crae, that you, who used to set up to be so fond of me, can seem really to enjoy my marrying another!"

"It is often a surprise to myself," said Colin.

This was all the conversation that took place during the pause for tea and strawberries on the second day.

There was one more day left.

On the third day there was so little business to transact that Colin and Christina thought they would not fash to work at all, but just sit and enjoy a quiet chat until Lord Hardcastle, whose signature was required, should find time to rush in, as he promised to do, about seven o'clock. The heat was intolerable indoors, and they went out into the square, and sat under the sooty trees, while cabs and carriages, in a ceaseless stream, went round and round the square. Some children were playing ball on the almost turfless lawn; otherwise the garden was deserted. Christina took off her big white hat and laid it in her lap, and the mellow sun coming through the trees lit up her golden hair till, as Joan Drummond used to say, it looked like a lamp. There is a solitariness about any unoccupied space in London, surrounded as it must be by the stream of life which flows unceasingly so near to it and yet so far away, which can hardly be equalled in even the most desert place far removed from the dwellings of men. A barrel-organ, with its melancholy mechanical indifference, beat out a lifeless tune, and banged its rollicking

"I don't care" into the brain with a very heartlessness of sound.

Christina sat silent, looking down at the hat in her lap, and digging it all over with a long hat-pin.

Perhaps it was because her marriage was only four weeks off that she was so thoughtful; or it may have been that amongst her crowd of new friends in London there was no one who really knew her like this old friend of long, long ago.

"Do you remember old Lumboro' days?" she said suddenly, following this inward train of thought. "This square often reminds me of a bit in the Public Gardens."

Colin replied that he remembered the Lumboro' days very well, and that he thought he knew which spot in the Gardens Christina must mean.

"They were very happy days," she said.

"They were indeed," said Colin heartily; "though, doubtless"—with sublime philosophy—"if we were to remember them accurately, we should find that they had their ups and downs like any other days."

Christina remarked that perhaps this might be so, but that she could not at this moment remember any disagreeables in connection with them.

"Your puir father, for instance," helping her memory, "was something of a tyrant."

"Yes," said Christina; "but then he was away nearly all day."

"You'll mind the Saturday afternoons?" said Colin.

"Yes," said Christina eagerly. "You used generally to bring me a bunch of flowers to wear when we went for walks together, and I used to put them into water at night, and they lasted over Sunday."

"I varied the thing by bringing sweeties sometimes," went on Colin, still in the reminiscent frame of mind; "in winter time it was as often chocolate as flowers."

"It was always something," said Christina gently.

"Do you still skate, Christina?" asked Colin. "I believe those Saturday afternoons on the skating pond used to be the happiest time of all. You were a good skater then, and I don't think I ever felt so proud as when I used to be flying round the pond with you, hand in hand."

Christina stopped pricking her hat with the long pin, and, raising gray eyes to Colin's face, said, "You *did* care for me then, Colin?"

"Oh, it was a boy-and-girl attachment," said Colin cheerfully, "but very pleasant while it lasted."

Christina returned to the operations with the hat-pin with much thoughtfulness, and her eyelids drooped again.

Colin, following the movements of her hands, said presently, "That is a very pretty bracelet you have got; it is a new one, isn't it?"

"Tim gave it to me," said Christina quickly.

"Let me see it."

She held out her hand, and Colin took it with as much or as little apparent emotion as an elderly doctor might show upon raising a fair wrist to feel a patient's pulse.

"The stones are lovely," he said, "and I think they make your hands look whiter than ever. I must say, Christina, you always had the prettiest hand I ever saw."

"Let go my hand," said Christina.

"Why does it shake so?" asked Colin.

"I don't know, Colin, I wish you would not come here any more to see me!"

"What way?"

"At least not till after I am married."

"I am not coming then—at least not till my patent is out and I have made a success; so I may as well come now."

"I'd rather you did not; the business is almost concluded now, and——"

"Not if you make up your mind to those transfers," said Colin quickly; "I must come again about them."

"It does not matter about the transfers," said Christina.

"It matters to the extent of five thousand pounds."

"I don't mind," said Christina.

"Then I'll just say good-bye. You have the key of the gate, haven't you?"

They wandered out of the square garden, and returned to the house and to the library to collect stray papers. Colin tied them up in a bundle, and said, "You won't forbid my coming to the wedding, I hope? for I have ordered a new suit of clothes for it."

"Come to the wedding if you like," said Christina. "It won't matter to me then, and it won't cost you any distress of mind."

"Woman," said Colin, "I meant to sit in a foremost pew and weep like a pew-opener. A marriage is always rather a depressing thing," he added cheerfully. And after this happy generalization on the part of Mr. M'Crae relative to weddings there was so considerable a pause in the conversation that he glanced at Christina,

who was standing with her back towards him, looking out of the window.

He crossed the room, and put his arm round her shoulder and kissed her. "Don't cry, Christina," he said.

"I'm not crying," said Christina.

"I only thought," he said, "that you were vexed at my saying that weddings were depressing."

"Oh, not at all."

"Well, I'll see you on the twenty-fifth." The twenty-fifth was the wedding-day.

"Yes."

"And I will negotiate the transfers."

"Deil take the transfers!" cried Christina, stamping her foot; and she swung round on her heel and hastily left the room.

And so the third day ended; and this is a faithful and exact record of all that occurred.

Of course the lynx-eyed world of London saw that its favourite—its "dear boy," Tim Southwark—was not happy; and what the eye of London sees the voice of London discusses. "Poor Tim" was pitied and envied in the same breath. Christina's money made things suitable, but the dear duke was not a bit like himself. It is true his conduct towards his *fiancée* was exemplary. Tim's good manners and his good feeling could always be relied upon, but the boy looked suddenly older, and he had altogether ceased to laugh and talk at the same time in the way that had been so characteristic of him. London said there was a married woman in the case who was making it very unpleasant for

Tim, and this well-worn, stale explanation of any difficulties that lie in the way of matrimony was accepted by the London world with its usual sapience as being an established fact. Tim evidently must care for some one whom it was impossible to marry, and the fact that no one knew who that some one could be only made the matter more interesting. Muriel Stonor, drooping at distant St. Moritz, and with eyes grown terribly big and starlike, was not once connected in the world's mind with the young Duke of Southwark.

She was little known to society, having lived the very quietest life since the death of her parents, and it was really much more piquant to ascribe the duke's ill looks to some mysterious married lady, name unknown. "Of all depressing things," said the world, "there is really nothing so depressing, when one comes to think of it, as a thoroughly suitable engagement. It gives one nothing to talk about. It must be horribly dull for the two people most nearly concerned in it; and unless, indeed, a mysterious married lady can be introduced to give it a slight flavour of mystery, the whole thing is very stupid, very dull, and a little *bourgeois*." Judith Campbell's marriage was really a more interesting affair, for the young people could not fail to be in the workhouse at the end of six months; and it was interesting to anticipate the troubles that lay before them, and to state with positive assurance the exact amount of the income which they would have to share between them.

The season had been rather a dull one, and there had not been much to talk about. People had got tired of saying that the duke looked wretched, that

the Stonors would undoubtedly be in the workhouse in six months' time, and that Barny's girl was as obdurate as ever, and had sent Barny to court death on a Polar expedition.

People said that the chances were he would never come back, and that Miss Greville didn't seem to care. It was really most disappointing to find that she *did* care, to hear—no one knew how it leaked out—that Barnabas had been sent for to say good-bye; that Barnabas had not been able to go because he was seriously ill; and that one day Miss Greville's superb carriage, with the superb Miss Greville herself inside, was drawn up quite frankly and openly before Lord Hardcastle's door, that a footman was told to inquire if his lordship would see Miss Greville, and that thereafter a tall and beautiful woman in her favourite black draperies swept upstairs and knelt at Lord Hardcastle's couch, and said, "Don't go, Barny."

No one knew how this story came to be told. There was a hospital nurse in attendance certainly, but she was not in the room; and although Barny's brother was staying in the house, he never said a word. But as Lord Hardcastle grew daily better and Miss Greville's visits continued—she being the most refined, particular, conventional woman in the whole of London—it was acknowledged everywhere that there must be something in it.

"After all," wrote Colin to Christina, "I do not believe I shall be able to be at the wedding; for the London Scottish are going to march down to Brighton about that time, and of course I must go with them.

We are very busy drilling and marching just now. I think we may be passing your way on Saturday." So Christina stayed at home on Saturday, and looked out of the window the whole morning, and saw nothing but the usual cabs and carriages and the stream of foot-passengers. In the afternoon, however, she was better rewarded; for she heard the shrill sound of the pipes, and presently the gray regiment, beloved of Highlanders, swung into the square. The sunshine beat down upon their bonneted heads, and caught the glitter of the silver on their sporrans as they danced gaily on the gray cloth of the kilts and swung to the swinging stride of the men. The sunshine marked out for special distinction a yellow-haired lad frae the north, tall and upright as the wand of the saugh that grows on the free hillside, with an air of joyous confidence about him, and with his bonnet cocked jauntily over his eyes. "With their bonnets an' feathers an' a', an' a'," skirled the pipes, and the men stepped out bravely to the jaunting tune, with the gray kilts swinging about their unfettered limbs. Christina, "keeking" from behind her drawing-room curtains, watched the regiment file past, and felt within her that glow of pride which the clans feel for each other when the pipes are playing and the kilts are swinging.

"He is a braw laddie, he is a braw laddie," her heart cried out, while her tongue spoke again in the old soft accents of the north. "Not one of them is so tall as he is; not one of them has such yellow curls and blue eyes. I would like to see him at the head of a regiment, like M——, telling the Highland lads that there were Englishmen looking down from the fort far above,

and bidding the worn-out men remember that they must march up the hill like Scots."

Colin had told her one day how, when M—— had thus appealed to them, the fever-stricken men who had been falling out one by one on the heavy march in the bed of a torrent, sniped at by a hidden foe, pulled themselves together ; while a slip of a lad, a boy piper in the regiment, stepped out from the ranks, cocked his bonnet, and set the ribbons flying, and putting his pipes under his oxters, played the regiment right into the fort of Jutogh.

"That is the way you would march, Colin," said Christina exultingly, looking down from her window at the young man's splendid form and his free swinging step. "That's the way you would lead your men."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THAT evening Christina wrote to her *fiancé*, and said,—

“MY DEAR TIM,—Please come and see me to-morrow and take me for a drive. I think we ought to see more of each other; indeed it would please me very much if you could be with me every day. I want to see you, and no one else but you, till we are married.—
Yours affectionately, CHRISTINA M'NAB.”

“P.S.—Please do not come on Saturday, as I think the London Scottish will be passing here that day.”

The duke came dutifully on the following afternoon. Christina, having ordered her carriage for four o'clock, looked out of her drawing-room window to watch for his approach, and was prepared to wave her hand to him with an air of welcome. There was an undefined feeling in Christina's mind that she had something to atone for, and she had prepared a speech of welcome which might satisfy the most ardent lover, as well as set her own conscience at rest. She would go forward to greet him with both her hands outstretched, and, discarding her usual reserve, would smile into his face, and say, “My dear, I am so glad you have come.”

She put on her prettiest hat and her most charming

gown, and smiled even outside the drawing-room door, where within she knew that Tim was now awaiting her.

He stood by the window, and the room was a long one. By the time she had reached the first sofa Christina's smile had waned a little, by the fireplace her outstretched hands drooped to her sides, under the palms her expression was blank, and when the duke turned round to give her his greeting Christina said, "How do you do? Do you know, you are much shorter than I thought you were?"

"Ha, ha!" laughed the duke; "I am very sorry, Christina. Bowed down by care perhaps," with a feeble attempt at jocularitv; then, because there was something just impinging on truth in his statement, the young man blushed, laughed, and said feebly, "My mother is rather short, you know."

Christina said "tuts" under her breath, and suggested that they should start for their drive. To her vigorous mind Tim's feeble rejoinder was not compensated for by its politeness, and she sailed downstairs feeling what she herself would have called "aggravated."

"Where shall we go? Ha, ha!" said the duke.

"Now there really is no joke in asking where we shall drive to," commented Christina; and she remarked that there were two teas she would like to attend before taking a turn in the park.

"Oh, teas, my dear, must we?" said the duke.

Christina's rebuking conscience caused her to say, "Is there anything you would like to do better?" but this indecision, while the footman waited by the carriage door for his orders, was distinctly foreign to her usual promptitude.

"What do you say to Lord's?" asked Tim; "or couldn't we drive somewhere quietly, where there is no crowd of people?"

"I will do just what you like," said Christina, in her old accommodating way; and the duke having suggested Richmond and tea there, with a drive back again when it was cooler, it became imperative that the footman should have orders of some sort, and Richmond was given as their destination, "though why," thought Christina, with her usual inward comment—"why a man should always want to get away from his fellow-creatures is what I cannot understand."

She wondered if Tim's tastes would always lie in the direction of solitude when the two were married, and the domestic aspect of matrimony, suddenly coming into view, smote her with a chill sense of apprehension.

Matrimony was not to be a public triumph, but personal experience. During pre-matrimonial days it is the privilege of the lady to commemorate her conquest in a manner somewhat barbaric, a little brazen and ostentatious, and her captive, willing or unwilling, is expected to be more or less tied to her chariot wheels.

But jubilees do not last for ever, and the day of demonstration must of necessity be short; and when the crowd has stopped staring, and the bands have ceased to play, and every one has gone home, when the blinds have been pulled down and the shouting is all over, then matrimony begins.

Visions of quiet evenings with Tim rose before Christina's eyes, of walks round the garden with Tim, of drives in the country just like this, still with Tim, and not a soul looking on.

"I wonder what we shall do when it is wet," thought Christina, and she gave such a deep sigh that Tim turned round and said, "Not tired, I hope?"

"Tim," said Christina, "do you think when we are married we might live in town?"

"In town!" said the duke, aghast. "In London, do you mean, and wear a tall hat all the year round?"

"London," said Christina dryly, "will soon become depopulated unless the fashion of gentlemen's headgear is altered. I have never heard them give a better reason for not living in the capital than that they would be obliged to wear a silk hat."

The duke laughed, but the idea of living in London could not, of course, be seriously contemplated by any reasonable man.

"We can run up for a week or two whenever you care about it," he said; "but I think it would be rather beastly to have one's home anywhere but in the country." Then after a pause, "No hunting or shooting, you know," he added in an explanatory manner.

"I do not hunt or shoot," snapped Christina. "Tim," she said firmly, "we must always have guests with us."

"Of course, of course, if you care about it," said the duke, "though I think myself it is rather nice to be quiet sometimes."

"In the realms of nature," thought Christina, with that inward shrewdness which never deserted her, "in the far-distant deserts of Egypt, or on African plains, or even indeed under dear dull green trees, in sleepy English lanes, it does not matter a bit whether you are a duke or not."

The thought was illuminating but horrible, and follow-

ing upon it there came again a vision of those quiet evenings by the winter fire, when the curtains would be drawn and the snow lie thick on the fields outside.

It was quickly dismissed by Christina with an impatient shrug. "My money, at least, is a substantial blessing," she thought, "however ephemeral other things may be." But even money may lack interest when a fortune is sufficiently large to make money appear non-existent, and the thought of those table-loads of handsome presents in Grosvenor Square, the almost endless trophies of gold and silver and diamonds, gave her a feeling of oppression, if not of nausea.

There was really nothing new nor fresh to be bought now; things could only be duplicated, carriage horses might be multiplied by ten, and silver plate by twenty, and fresh servants might be engaged as caretakers of fresh possessions, but that any solid satisfaction could be got from heaping up treasure seemed very doubtful.

Pausing in her cogitations, Christina was aware that her companion had cleared his throat three successive times. "I hope, dear," said the duke, with boyish awkwardness—"I hope we shall get on all right, and—and that I shall make you happy and all that."

There was a note of apology in his voice that was not lost upon Christina M'Nab.

"There's a great deal in getting used to each other," she remarked, with her almost alarming sapiency.

"Yes, yes," said the duke eagerly, "I do think there is a great deal in that, you know;" and then, still with that suspicious note of apology in his voice, he continued, "and, of course, I do believe in mutual respect and good fellowship, and that sort of thing."

"Yes," said Christina; "they are very valuable" (stumbling upon truthfulness again) "in their own way."

"Now we must have tea," he said, with an air of relief, as the carriage drew up at the Star and Garter Hotel.

They had tea and bread-and-butter at a little round table, and Christina heard one of the waiters remark to another that that was the young Dook of Southwark and his young woman.

After tea they took a turn in the park, and Tim somewhat laboriously pointed out objects of interest in the landscape.

"We are quite like old married people," he said to Christina as they drove back home again.

"Yes, quite old," said Christina, with unconscious sarcasm.

In the evening they were at a dance together, and Christina told the duke three times that she was not in the least tired after her drive, turning at last to him with grave eyes, and asking, "Why do you inquire so often?"

"I thought you looked a little tired," said Tim. "Why not rest to-morrow—we need not do anything, need we?—and I will not come and bother you."

"Thank you, Tim," said Christina.

"The duke," said an impertinent boy partner, who took Christina in to supper, "is like a Cheshire cat without its grin. We call it 'the serious wooing,' you know, Miss M'Nab."

"A wooing ought to be serious," said Christina sentimentously.

"Quite, quite," said the boy partner, in a fashionable, fatuous way.

Lord Hardcastle came up to claim a dance, saying, "Let us renew our youth, Miss M'Nab. In a few weeks' time we shall both be staid old married people." He laughed so joyously as he said it that Christina caught the infection of it and laughed too.

"Life is a very delightful thing, don't you think?" he said in an irrelevant manner, and with a happy self-congratulatory air.

"Oh," said Christina, with charming sincerity, "I am so glad it has come all right for you, I am so glad you are happy!"

He gave her hand a little grateful squeeze, and remarked,—

"It is very absurd to feel so boyish as I do, but as a matter of fact, I really must dance. Do you mind, or are you tired?"

"Every one thinks I am tired to-night," said Christina, "but I should really like to dance."

They took a few swift turns round the emptying ballroom, and then went to sit on one of the balconies of the house.

"Tell me about yourself," said Barnabas; "I have become so horribly egotistical that I have forgotten even to ask about settlements and transfers, and bonds and coupons."

"I think all the business is finished now," replied Christina in a flat voice.

"I think," said Lord Hardcastle, "that it was the very pleasantest sort of business that I ever took part in. We are all so glad, you know, that you and Tim

are going to be happy; and then you did spoil us dreadfully during our business conferences. What a good fellow M'Crae is!" He waited for an assent, but none being forthcoming he went on, "You have known him all your life, so, of course, the fact that he is a good fellow does not appeal to you as being a very startling new discovery."

Still no answer, and the kindly voice went on,—

"That new lamp of his seems to be extraordinarily clever. I was speaking to Lord Kelvin about it, and there seems no doubt that it is going to be a great success." A long pause.

"I believe you really are tired. Why not let me fetch Mrs. Hayes and tell her you want to go home?"

"No, please, I really do not want to go yet," said Christina.

"Lord Hardcastle, I wish you would do something for me." She raised her sweet gray eyes to his, and Barney replied, "Why, of course I will. What is it?"

"I wish you would find out if the London Scottish are going to march through Grosvenor Square on Saturday."

"I can do that with pleasure."

"Then I think I will go home now."

Now whether Lord Hardcastle used any influence with the colonel of the regiment or not is more than I am prepared to say, but the fact remains that the Highlanders in their gray kilts did march through Grosvenor Square on Saturday afternoon, and that Christina M'Nab watched them from her drawing-room windows—with the most disastrous results!

Colin M'Crae looked up at the windows. "He can't

see me, surely," said Christina, drawing back into the folds of the curtains. But Colin's eyes had travelled farther than the drawing-room floor. They were directed to some upper window far above Christina's head. "He will think I am in my bedroom," said Christina. And then a very strange thing happened. *Colin*—Colin M'Crae—marching along with his regiment, smiled up at that upper window, and *kissed his hand*. Of course, gentle reader, you will say that this was impossible—that no young man marching by in the streets of London with the London Scottish Volunteers *could* kiss his hand to an upper window of a house in Grosvenor Square. All I can say is that Colin did this very thing. Not only so, but having done it once, it would seem that his salutation must have met with some response, for Colin *did it again*, and then passed smiling down the square.

Christina ran upstairs like a lamplighter. "Jessie!" she cried, bursting into that faithful abigail's room which was next her own—"Jessie, at your age it is—it is *indecent!*" But Jessie was not in her room. "It must be Eliza, then—that pert English housemaid with the bony cheeks and the saucy curls." And Christina sped onwards to the highest story of her house; but here, as on the lower floor, all was deserted. She returned to the drawing-room and rang the bell precipitately. To her came Jessie (all scared like, as she said), and Christina drew herself to her full height, the angry flush still on her face, and said, "Jessie, if I find that there is a servant in this house who kisses her hand to soldiers, she leaves at the term!"

"Such tantrums," murmured Jessie, descending to the lower regions again.

But the matter could not rest there. For his own sake Christina must speak to the delinquent. A footman was summoned, and dispatched with a note to Mr. M'Crae to come at once. So Colin came in a hansom, still clad in the gray kilt which had so much offended Lady Tarbutt's sensibilities.

Christina stood in the middle of her drawing-room. She was too angry to sit down.

"Colin," she said, almost before the young man had entered the room—"Colin, I will *not* have my house disgraced in this way."

Colin laughed, with the backward throw of his head which helped to make the sound so mirthful, but he gave no explanation of his conduct.

"Please don't suppose," went on Christina, "don't—don't dare to suppose that I mind for my own sake—that I mind, I mean, whom you kiss your hand to. But I do not—I do not like to see you, Colin, behaving like a common body."

"You haven't told me what I did yet," said Colin, smiling.

"No, and I will not tell you," said Christina, with dignity; "but remember, *if* it was Eliza, that most disagreeable and impertinent girl leaves at this day month."

"It wasn't Eliza," said Colin.

"Then who—— Colin, I won't debase myself by asking who it was."

"I was kissing my hand," said Colin, "to an old sweetheart of mine."

"Colin," said Christina, and her voice shook, "you know—you know you couldn't see me behind the curtains."

"No," said Colin, "but I was kissing good-bye to all she used to be to me in the old days. I can't come to her wedding, you see, Christina, so that was my way of saying good-bye to her."

"And you thought I was upstairs?" said Christina softly.

"No," said Colin; "it was just to an old memory that I threw a kiss of farewell."

They were standing opposite to each other in the big London drawing-room, the fine young Highlander in his kilt and shoon, and the girl with her white gown and golden hair, and her face all blushes, and sudden pallors, and blushes again, and all the outside world of London became dim; they two were alone in all the world—only Christina and Colin in the whole universe. Tim was a fantasy of the brain, like the passing traffic outside; nothing and no one were real, nor breathed, except Christina and Colin, two persons in an empty world, and only a few feet of polished floor between them.

And they said nothing more to each other; only Colin just looked at her and held out his arms, and Christina was in them before she knew very well what she was about, and was saying with a little sob and a little laugh, and then a sob and a laugh together,—

"Colin, I think it was always you."

"Christina, darling, darling," said Colin, "haven't I known that all the time?"

"The conceit of you, Colin!" cried Christina. "Why, I only found it out myself two or three days ago."

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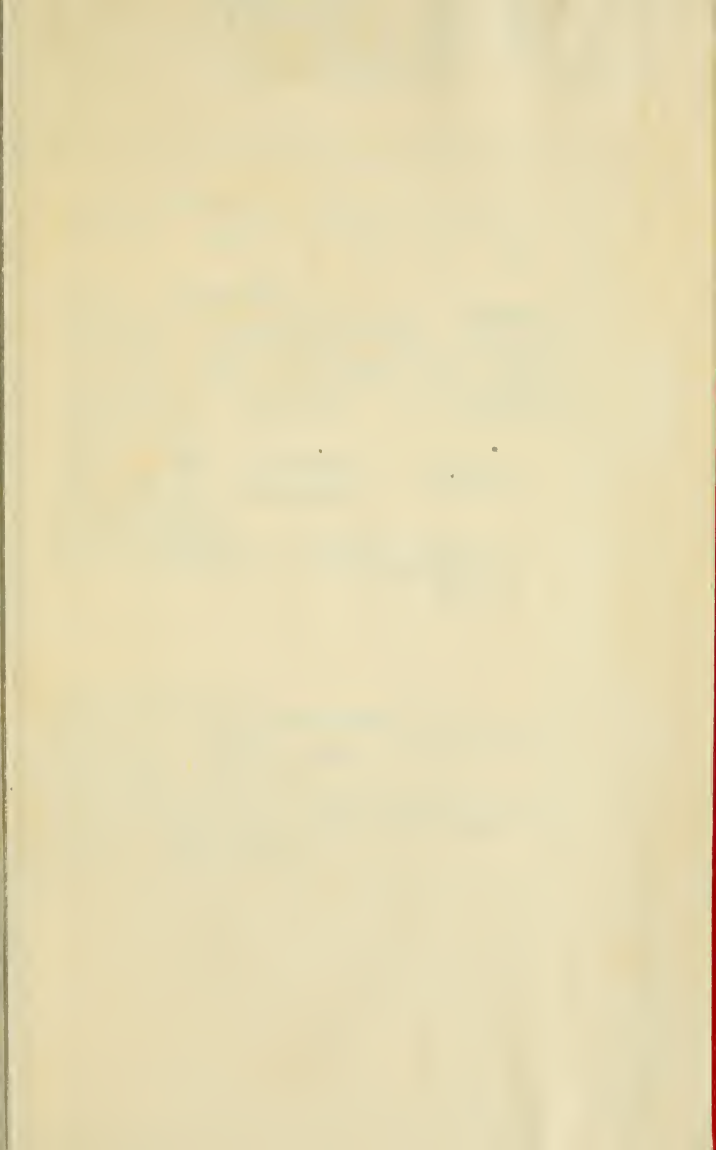
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